



## **Heroes and Freaks by Michael-hearteyes-wheeler**

**Category:** Stranger Things, 2016

**Genre:** Friendship, Sci-Fi

**Language:** English

**Characters:** Dustin H., Eleven/Jane H., Lucas S., Mike W.

**Status:** In-Progress

**Published:** 2017-12-15 00:50:05

**Updated:** 2018-01-26 07:09:08

**Packaged:** 2019-12-17 00:28:19

**Rating:** T

**Chapters:** 15

**Words:** 39,235

**Publisher:** [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

**Summary:** What would happen if Hawkins was home to more than just one supernatural little girl? Mike, Dustin, and Lucas still find Eleven that rainy night in November 1983, but she finds something much more, people like her. A Stranger Things Superpower AU.

## 1. Chapter One: Cold and Alone

Hello everyone! So this is my first Stranger Things Fanfiction! I love the show a lot and I haven't written anything in a long time so it was fun getting back into it with this little story. A big shout out to .com for coming up with the idea for a superpower au. Please go check her out and also check out these awesome 'strangerpower' moodboards she created!

Thanks, Enjoy.

---

Cold and alone.

That is how Eleven felt sitting in the dark, wet woods. She had cried until her head pounded, and her face was swollen. And when the minutes turned into hours, and the hours stretched into days, she began to regret ever leaving her - home? Was it a home? She lived and slept and ate there but it felt more like a prison. It's cold white walls, the sterile smell of the rooms and hallways, the blank faces of scientists and specialists, the pain of being probed, poked, and prodded. Eleven shuddered at the memory and regained a sense of determination. No, she would not miss her old life, not even for a second. She was more safe here in the dark woods, hungry and cold, than she ever was at the lab. At least here she was free. Is free the right word? Eleven pondered for a moment about the meaning of the word that she had only heard a few times in her short life. Free meant unchained, free meant the ability to do whatever you wanted. All she really wanted was to be happy, and safe. Safe meant protected from people who want to hurt you. People like Papa, and the other scientists who shoved needles in her arms, and shocked her, and hit her, and locked her in dark rooms alone to cry. Cry like she was doing now.

She sobbed quietly to herself, pulling her knees into her chest and pressing herself harder against the trunk of a tall pine tree. Cold drops of rain fell on her shaved scalp, and ran down her neck, making her shiver. Cold and alone.

Then suddenly, a noise coming from somewhere behind forced her

out of her sorrow, and into defense mode. Slowly she stood, tears streaming down her face, and eyes searching. She heard the noise again; Crunching, and voices muffled by the rain and wind. Eleven's heart raced and she panicked as her thoughts swam with who it could be. Papa? Or the other bad men? The voices grew closer coming straight in her direction and she saw the flickering of flashlights searching the ground. Her heart pounded so loud it left her ears ringing and then in an instant, that robotic and terrifying part of her that she tried so desperately to force away clicked on. She felt the familiar trickle of blood fall from her nose and she hardened the thought that this is who she is. This is what she was built for.

She lowered her gaze at the light beams and approaching silhouettes, and channeled all of her fear, anger, pain, and panic into the heavy rocks on the ground around her. The rocks lifted from their places, buried in the mud, and rose high into the air in a circle around the girl. She was a weapon, a tool, a monster. Once the voices were loud enough, and the lights close enough, Eleven released every ounce of adrenaline she had left and threw the rocks soaring through the air at the approaching figures. She knew she had made a direct hit when she heard a scream, and saw a figure collapse. Two remained standing. Then another hit sent the figure closest to her flying backwards, knocking it into a tree. She heard a muffled yelp, and then a heavy thud. She was about to telekinetically send her last, biggest rock, at the final figure when the flashlight now pointing directly at her fell to the ground, and the figure's arms erupted in flames. Had she done this? If she had, she hadn't meant to. Eleven had never set anything on fire before, she wasn't even sure if it was possible for her to do so, let alone without her knowledge of making it happen.

Her racing thoughts were cut short when a burst of hot red lights, and the zapping sound of electricity ripped through the forest, and sent Eleven flying backwards onto the ground. She gasped for breath and tried to stand back up. Her palms slipped on the muddy slope. She finally clambered back up to come face to face with her attackers. Tensing her jaw and raising more muddy rocks from the soil, she prepared to take out these men once and for all.

Eleven raised her trembling hands and sent another wave of stones

through the air. She screamed as a surge of power ripped through her. Several heavy rocks flew towards the now burning figure, but they were blocked by another hot flash of light. Eleven didn't understand what was happening, but she continued sending stones, twigs, pinecones, and anything else laying on the forest floor forward. The burning man held up his own hand and all of Elevens ranged weapons erupted with flames. They fell to the ground in ashen heaps. Eleven panicked, she could hardly believe her eyes.

She turned to run, needing to put some distance between herself and the ever approaching attackers. Another loud crackling sound roared through the air like lightning, and something hot struck Eleven in the back. She fell to her knees and cried out. A thick band of warm red light wrapped around Elevens wrist like a lasso, jerking her back around to face the men again. Another hot trickle of blood fell from her nose and in a last ditch effort, she hurled one more massive log up at them. It collided with the two closest to her, but the third continued down the hill. Eleven collapsed. Using her powers in this way drained her terribly. It was no use to fight anymore. She resolved to let them capture her, and face whatever torture awaited her back in the lab with Papa.

She was staring at the ground when the last man reached her. Two heavy, mud covered boots stomped down in front of her. This must have been the burning man, because the air felt warm and the forest was now awash in flickering orange light. Eleven lifted her gaze to meet his and gasped.

These were not Papas men at all. Her attackers were children.

Lit by only the flames licking across one of the boys arms, she could now see that they were just as scared of her, as she was of them. One of the boys was holding some sort of orb of light in between his hands. Another boy had long shaggy hair covering his face, and was standing on all fours like a dog. The boys lowered there defenses, seeing now that their enemy was just a scared little girl. The ball of light disappeared, and the boy with long hair stood up, his face becoming less and less canine. Eleven didn't understand what she was seeing, and she couldn't catch her breath. Tears welled in her eyes and she began to tremble with sobs. The boy closest to her, with arms still aflame, stepped closer and knelt down to look into her tear filled

eyes.

Eleven looked up preparing to see the same anger, and disappointment that she had come to expect in the eyes of others. She instead saw something she couldn't place, something that calmed her. The boy's eyes were kind, his dark hair stuck to his forehead with rain and sweat, and his face was smudged with dark dirt, but he looked soft and caring. He extended a hand toward her, extinguishing the flames and touching her gently on the shoulder. His hand was unbelievably warm on her skin, intensified by the fact that she was chilled down to bone from being in the woods in only a hospital gown for so long. She was searching his face, trying to figure out what he was thinking, and if she was in danger, when he spoke.

"Are you okay?"

That was all he said, and it was enough to send another wave of sadness through the frail girl. She fell forward into the arms of the young boy, partly from the longing to be comforted, and partly from exhaustion. The boy wrapped his arms around Eleven and the heat from his skin made the water on hers steam and rise up into the air. The rain slowed to only a slight drizzle and the forest fell silent aside from the sounds of this mysterious girl's sobbing. The boy didn't know what to do, or what to think, all he knew is that this girl needed help, and some dry clothes. So he held her for what felt like hours, his friends kneeling in the mud beside them, they rubbed the girl's back and they let her cry out every fear she had until he finally found the right words.

"Let's take you home."

The girl looked up at him with fear and confusion. To Eleven, home meant the torture of being a weapon, and a science experiment. It meant going back to the place she had just escaped, back to the place where she was a prisoner. But here, in the arms of a stranger, feeling the closest thing to safety that she had felt in a long time, she knew that 'home' to this boy had to mean something different, something better. So she nodded, and the boy helped her to her feet. The boy gave her his jacket, and held her close to him, and they walked out of the forest in silence. They walked all the way across town through back alleys and dark streets until Eleven's feet hurt and she felt she

might faint from exhaustion. They walked until they came up to a large house out on the outskirts of town, nestled into the woods. The house was towering, dark, and unfamiliar. Eleven hesitated to step onto the porch, and the boy understood why. He grabbed her a little tighter and said the words Eleven had been wanting to hear for so long.

"Don't worry, you will be safe here."

And for some reason she knew she could believe him.

---

**Hope you enjoyed! Please let me know if you did in the comments down below. I have not decided how long to make this story yet but I tend to be pretty long winded so buckle up!**

## 2. Chapter Two: Fresh Blood

Eleven woke up suddenly, she shot straight up and gasped. Reeling from a terrible nightmare, her heart pounded rapidly and she tried to catch her breath. She looked around and didn't recognize her surroundings at all, she started to panic. She fought to untangle herself from the blankets and sheets she was under before the previous night krept back into her memory. The woods, the rain, fighting some strange boys, them being kind to her, being brought to a strange house, and then, nothing. That was as much as she could remember. Her head was throbbing, a common side effect of using her powers, and her pillow was stained with blood, another common side effect. She looked around the unfamiliar room and tried to piece together the blanks in her memory.

The room was small and warm, it had thick shaggy carpet and cream colored wallpaper. Other than the small bed she was sitting on there was a dresser opposite from her against the wall, and a small table and chair in the corner by a large window. There was a light on a table next to the bed, along with a box of tissues, and some crumpled up bloody tissues that she assumed must have been from last night. Eleven had been put into an oversized t-shirt, and a pair of light pink shorts. She frowned looking down at her dirty, bruise covered, and scraped legs. In fact, almost all of her was either bruised, or scuffed or both. Some from the forest, but most from before. She shuddered.

Eleven got up to look outside and couldn't help but smile at the view. All her life she had never seen the outside, she only knew what it looked like from the glimpses she caught when finding people for Papa. She must have been up on the second story because she could see the tops of several trees, and far off rolling hills. The house she was in sat in the middle of a large peaceful field, but was surrounded by trees on all sides. It felt safe, she decided, they way the house was protected by trees. Completely encompassed by the view outside, Eleven didn't notice that the door behind her had opened until a voice snapped her back to reality.

"You're awake!"

It was the same voice from last night. Eleven turned around to see



the boy who had helped her, and been kind enough to hold her. He was smiling, and holding a plate of food, and a cup of water in his hands. Eleven felt the corners of her mouth turn up in another faint smile before she remembered what Papa had told her about the outside world; "The outside is a dangerous place, Eleven. Full of people who will do anything they can to get you, and hurt you." She frowned and looked down at the floor. The boy slowly crossed the room and sat the food down on the table in the corner. He pulled the chair out and gestured towards it.

"Um this is for you, we figured you would be hungry but we didnt know when you would wake up." He smiled a bit awkwardly and Eleven realized that he was just as unsure of her, as she had been of him. It made her feel a bit better, and she sat down. The boy sat against the wall facing her and played nervously with his hands.

Eleven noticed that his knuckles were red and blistered. She looked down at the plate and didn't recognize any of the food besides the eggs. Her stomach growled and she stuffed as much food in her mouth as she could, she didn't even pause to breathe. The boy watched and laughed quietly. Eleven took a large drink of water and glared at him. What was funny? She turned and stuffed her face again until the plate was empty. She licked her fingers and realized that this was the first food she had eaten in almost a week.

"If you are still hungry I can make you some more. I only really know how to make Eggos but how hard can Scrambled eggs be?" The boy looked at her but quickly looked away when Eleven made eye contact with him. Why was he nervous? She nodded and he stood up and grabbed the plate from her. He stopped in the doorway and turned around to look at her again.

"Um I'm happy you are awake, you had us all worried there for a minute." He gave another awkward smile before turning around and leaving the room.

He came back awhile later with two round breadlike things with some dark sticky liquid drizzled across the top. Eleven had never had 'Eggos' before, Papa didn't allow her to have sweets very often unless had done something really good for him. She took a bite and her eyes widened. Never in her life had she ever tasted something so delicious,

so warm and flakey, so chewy and soft, so sweet and delicious. Before she knew it both Eggos were gone, and so were the second helping of eggs. She licked the remaining syrup from her plate and fingers and didn't even realize the boy sitting against the wall smiling at her.

"My name is Mike, by the way. I realized I haven't told you. What is your name?" Eleven froze. She didn't want to tell this nice boy, this Mike, her name. Her name was just another piece of herself that reminded her she wasn't truly a person. She looked up at Mike and saw the kindness and concern in his eyes so she slowly lifted her wrist.

Mike looked down and saw the small black numbers on the girls wrist. '011'. His mouth dropped, did this girl, this little girl who couldn't have been any older than him have a tattoo? And more importantly was this code supposed to be her name? Eleven saw his shocked expression and pulled her wrist back, tucking it into her lap. Another reminder that she was a monster.

"Eleven? Is that you name? Like the number?" Mike asked hesitantly. Eleven nodded.

"Well... Maybe we can call you.. El! Short for Eleven. Just like Mike is short for Michael." He smiled trying to make Eleven feel comfortable. She nodded again and looked up at him. He was leaning in closely to her, and for the first time Eleven saw what this boy really looked like. He was quite tall, and thin, with long limbs. His hair was dark black like the night sky, and his eyes were somehow even darker. His skin was pale, not as pale as Elevens, but he had red cheeks and an overall warmth to him. His face was dotted with light brown freckles that looked like stars. Eleven felt a strange flutter in her chest looking at him, it reminded her of feeling nervous, and scared but it was somehow happy. It felt good.

"Yes." Elevens voice was weak from being unused for so long. Mike tilted his head a bit perplexed. "Yes El." She tried to smile earnestly but her heart was still thumping around wildly.

"Okay um great! Well... I told everyone that you were awake and they really want to meet you, plus we have to figure out where your parents are." Mike stood up and walked toward the door; He turned

for El to follow but she remained sitting, looking at the floor. El knew she didn't have 'parents', she only had Papa and she certainly didn't want to find him. Mike saw her discomfort and knelt on the floor below her to catch her gaze.

"El?" His voice full of concern. She looked at him with tears in her eyes for what must have been the thousandth time. "Why were you alone in the woods last night? Did you run away? From your parents I mean?"

El nodded, looking at her hands. "Bad."

"Bad? Did they hurt you?" Mike gasped. El nodded again slowly looking at him. She slowly pushed the sleeves of her large shirt up so Mike could see the dark purple finger shaped bruises on her upper arm, and many smaller green and yellow bruises that covered most of her skin. He understood. She had been branded and owned like a cow. She had been beaten several times for what looked like months given the fact that those bruises were in all different stages of healing. He had seen her last night, seen the way she was able to lift rocks from the ground without touching them, the way she could manipulate things with her mind. She was like him, she was special and different, she had an amazing ability, but whoever she had run away from didn't agree, and so they hurt her. She was someone's punching bag, someone's weapon.

"El? We won't let those bad people hurt you. You will be safe here. I promise." He looked her in the eye and she tried to stop crying.

"Pro-miss?" She asked, never having heard the word before.

"Yes promise. It means something you can never break. I promise you will be safe, so you always will be." He tried to sound strong, to make her feel safe and he hoped she understood.

"Okay. Promise." She gave a small, half-smile and Mike stood back up, extending a hand to her.

"Good. Now let's go introduce you to the house." El grabbed Mike's hand, the way she had grabbed Papa's a hundred times before. Only Mike wasn't leading El somewhere scary, or to something painful.

Mike was leading her to her new life, and for the second time with him she felt safe.

### 3. Chapter Three: Family

"Hey shes Alive!" A loud voice ripped through the quiet mumblings of the occupants of the house. El Recognized the boy from last night, he had been the one who appeared almost dog like. This was the first time she remembered that her encounter with the boys had been quite strange. Had it all been a dream or did these boys have abilities as well? The boy bounded towards her, he was on the shorter side, and a bit rounder than the other kids. He had a light brown, curly mop of hair that spilled out from under a baseball cap. His smile was huge and inviting, and El quickly noticed his teeth, or rather the lack thereof. He extended his hand toward the girl and she looked at him shyly, not knowing the meaning of the gesture. He coolly pulled the hand back and scratched his head.

"Um she's kinda shy." Mike said letting go of Els hand. She realized that he had been holding it since they left the bedroom. It made her feel safe.

"Right I guess that makes sense, we didn't exactly meet under the best circumstances." The boy flashes a toothless grin. "My name is Dustin, and i'm the ideas guy, and the ladies man."

"Oh shut up Dustin! Since when have you ever been the 'ideas guy'?" A tall dark skinned boy from across the living room said with a grimace. El recognized him as the boy who had somehow grown a ball of light in his hands.

"Yeah or a 'ladies man'?" Asked Mike, matching the darker boys scowl.

"Hey hey she doesn't know anything about me, so I thought I would try to embellish the truth a little bit, okay? Sue me!" Dustin shrugged, and the other boy punched him in the arm.

"Well Im Lucas," The final boy stepped towards El. "Sorry I hit you yesterday but you got me pretty good with that rock." Lucas pulled up his shirt to show a large purple bruise covered in broken blood vessels and deep scrapes. El gulped.

"Sorry I hit you too." El weakly croaked, looking down at the ground.

"Its okay El, you were just scared." Mike leaned down to try to catch her gaze, and he smiled at her warmly.

"Yeah she wasn't the only one." Lucas crossed his arms.

"That was pretty cool though Lucas, you have to admit." Dustin smacked his friend on the back. "So you can move rocks with your mind? Can you move other things too? Or just rocks?"

El shuffled nervously. She could do a lot more than just move rocks. The truth was that she could kill everyone in this rooms with just a twitch of her head if she focussed hard enough. Her gut turned at the memory of snapping the necks of two guards in the lab. The horrible crunching sound and shallow breathing, and the sickeningly prideful smile Papa had given her. Before she had escaped her 'training' had grown more and more intensive until she was forced to manipulate more than physical objects as well. El could find, hunt, see, and almost even touch anyone, anywhere in the world with nothing but a newspaper clipping photo. 'Eleven you are our best resource for keeping the country safe, you are our most important weapon against evil.' Her Papa would tell her over and over. Her head swam with the terrible memories and she staggered for a moment and looked to Mike for reassurance. He nodded at her and smiled shyly.

"Anything." El said, hoping it was enough to answer Dustins questions.

"You can move anything?" Dustin asked excitedly.

"Prove it." Lucas smirked.

"She doesn't have to prove anything, Lucas!" Mike shoved his friend lightly.

"What!? She could have killed me, the least she can do is show what she is capable of!" Lucas yelled.

"No she doesn't, Lucas." A firm voice bellowed from the other end of the house. El jumped, she hadn't been aware that anyone else was in the house. The boys stopped arguing and turned to look at the open

entry way into the kitchen where a large man was now standing.

"Now everyone calm down and give her some space. She is probably scared enough as it is." The tall man walked towards the group of kids, followed closely behind by a teenage boy with voluminous and flowy hair.

"Why don't you have a seat, kid. We need to have a talk." The man gestured for El to sit down on a cozy looking couch. El looked at Mike who gave her a slight nod, and they sat down together. Dustin sat criss crossed on the floor, and Lucas leaned against the arm of the couch, opposite El. The man sat in a large arm chair across from the nervous girl and gave a hesitant smile.

"Great. So let's start with your name." The man took out a cigarette and patted his pockets. He sighed and turned toward Mike. "Help me out here kid."

Mike let out a small chuckle and then flicked his finger at the tip of the man's cigarette. Instantly it ignited and the man took a deep puff, then exhaled and sighed. El was stunned, what she had seen last night in the woods wasn't a dream at all, these people were like her.

El held up her wrist the way that Papa had instructed her to show the man. His eyes flew open and he took another long drag.

"But we are going to call her El!" Mike interjected, reading the tension. "Short for.. Eleven."

"Wait wait wait, this little girl's name is Eleven!? Like the number!?" The teenage boy yelled, pointing at El. She turned away embarrassed.

"Yeah, like some kind of freak." Lucas scoffed.

"Hey! I don't want to hear anything like that." The man yelled at Lucas who got up and walked to the kitchen. The man sighed and furrowed his brow. This child was as pale as a ghost, and skinny as a rod, and he had certainly never seen any 12 year old girl with a shaved head. Something terrible had happened to her. "Okay kid, El. Got it. Well my name is Jim Hopper but you can call me Hop. The kids all do. And this here is Steve." The teen smiled. "Now, can you

tell me what you were doing alone in the woods last night?"

El looked at her hands for a moment, unsure of how to answer. She had a lot of reasons to be in the woods, but she wasn't sure who she could trust, or how to explain her feelings.

"Ran.. Ran away." She finally said still looking down. "From bad men."

"Bad men?" Hopper asked sternly.

"They hurt her, Hop." Mike added. "Show him El, its okay." El looked at him and he smiled.

She took a deep breathe and revealed for the second time that day the dark bruises on her arms. Hopper looked in disbelief and the room fell silent, all of the boys mouths dropped. Then taking another step forward, El lifted her shirt just slightly to show to almost completely black bruises on her stomach and ribs from being kicked. Hopper stood and placed a hand on the frail girls shoulder. Els eyes filled with tears and she lowered her shirt again. She didn't know how to express the severity of her shame, or fear. So she choked out the only words she could think to let this man know how desperate she was.

"Please... Stay here." She collapsed to the floor and cried harder than she had in a long time. She needed these people to understand that she couldn't go back to where she had come from. Hopper did seem to understand when he lifted the small girl up from the ground and pulled her into a hug. She felt uneasy with any amount of human contact, but she didn't try to pull away. She actually felt cared for in the arms of this gruff stranger.

"I'm not going to let anyone hurt you like this. Do you understand?" Hopper hugged her tighter, and then pulled away to look into her eyes. She nodded weakly.

"Yeah El, you are safe here with us." Dustin stood up and walked toward the small girl. "We all had pretty crappy lives before we met each other, now we are like one big happy family."



"Fam.. Family?" El knew what a family was, and she knew she had never had one.

"Yeah, kid. We watch out for each other." Hopper smiled at her, and she smiled back. She believed him.

El sat back down in her place next to Mike, and Hopper returned to his chair. Everything was silent for a moment before Steve broke the tension.

"So... You can move things with you mind?" El glanced up at the teen and nodded.

"Well then, sounds like you'll fit in well here." Hopper said standing up. "Lets see what you can do, kid."

---

"Alright, El. The boys tell me you can make rocks fly." The group was standing outside in the unseasonably warm fall weather. Hopper lit another cigarette with Mikes help and watched the young girl. She took a deep breath and stepped forward. She was used to using her powers under the supervision of spectators, but this time she didn't feel like a lab rat. This time she felt good... almost happy.

El focused on a pile of spare tractor tires and scrap metal. She lowered her gaze and lifted a hand at the pile. Slowly several pieces of metal and rubber floated up into the air and danced around in the fall breeze. El lifted them higher and higher and forced more energy into lifting the largest, heaviest tractor tire until it too joined the synchronized dance. She heard a few gasps from behind her, and then a chorus of cheers, and it broke her concentrations. The objects fell back to the earth in a clatter and she turned around smiling shyly. Her face was flushed and she could feel the familiar trickle of blood running down from her nose.

"Hey it's okay, El." Mike grabbed a tissue from his pocket and handed it to the girl. She wiped off her nose and remembered a word Papa had taught her. Telenetic? Tele-... she wracked her brain searching for the word when it hit her.

"Telekinetic." El stated excitedly.

"Telekinesis? Like a superhero!" Dustin beamed.

El didn't know what to say, she often did not have the right words but this time she wasn't sure if the right words even existed. Superhero? El knew what a hero was. A hero was a great person who saved others. People had called Papa a hero for his work with Eleven, for his *creation*. El knew that a hero was the opposite of a monster, so how could Dustin call her one? When she had never saved anyone. She had only hurt people, hurt those who were just doing their job. Hurt Papa's, hurt these strangers in front of her now? She felt tears fill her eyes and she looked at the ground. Mike stepped closer to her, he didn't know what El had gone through, or where she had come from but he understood the look on her face.

"It's okay El. I know it must have been hard for you, wherever you were. We have all been there. People treat us like monsters because we are different." Mike rubbed the burns on his knuckles.

"Yeah we get beat up in school, and everyone in town thinks we are freaks.. Even our own parents are scared of us." Lucas said crossing his arms.

"You... what powers?" El looked up at Lucas and Dustin. She didn't know how to ask what they were able to do.

"Well I am a shapeshifter." Dustin jumped up and put his fists on his hips, trying his best to look like Superman.

"Shape.. Shifter?" El asked.

"Yeah it means I can turn into any animal living or dead. Watch." Before her eyes, Dustin began morphing into a shaggy, light brown dog. He barked once and sat up on his back legs. El was stunned. It was the most amazing this she had ever seen. Then in a blink of an eye he morphed again into an orange tabby cat and jumped around in the tall grass. He rubbed against El's legs and she giggled. Papa had asked her to hurt cats before but she never could, she knew they were too kind and didn't deserve it. She shuddered at the memory.

"God Dustin I hate it when you do that!" Mike yelled as his friend had turned into a hummingbird and was flying around the boy's head.

Dustin flew onto the ground and morphed back into his normal, boyish self. He was laughing so hard he coughed. El smiled.

"Yeah yeah yeah he can turn into a flea bag, but I am the real superhero." Lucas stood and held his hands out in front of his chest, as if he was holding a sphere. Slowly a red ball of light formed in the space, and a buzzing sound rumbled through the field. The ball grew and grew, as did the noise, and then he turned and aimed it at the tree line. The kids all turned as the ball hit a far off tree, and several huge branches cracked off and fell to the ground. A round of whooping and cheers rang out and the boys patted Lucas on the back. He looked proud.

"It's called an Optic Force Blast. It's basically a manipulation of light particles, making them dense like a solid object." He said looking down his nose at El. She stiffened and forced a small smile. "And as you can probably already tell, Mike is a Pyrokinetic." Lucas gestured at the taller boy.

"Pyro..." El struggled with the new word.

"Pyrokinetic. It means I can manipulate fire." Mike said shyly. He normally would have been just as eager to show off his abilities as his friends, especially to someone who would understand what wielding such power was like. But El made him feel different and strange; He didn't want to do anything to embarrass himself. El looked at him inquisitively so he lit a small flame in the palm of his hand and held it out for her to see. She waved her fingers around the fire cautiously, and marveled at the faint smell of smoke now drifting on the breeze.

"Hey guys what the hell? Was no one going to tell me she woke up?" A tall thin older girl came running down the back steps with her arms crossed. El felt her breath catch in her throat. This was by far the prettiest girl she had ever seen. Her hair was long and flounced as she walked toward the group. Her features were sharp but in a way that made her look like a sculpture. El tried to hide behind Mike, he was still radiating heat and it made her feel safe for some reason.

"You must be the new recruit. My name is Nancy, what's yours?"

El looked up nervously at Mike who gave her a reassuring nod. "El."

"Well El glad you're here." Nancy stepped forward and put a hand on Els shoulder. She jumped at the touch, not just because contact make her uneasy, but because the older girls fingers were icy cold.

"Oh yeah El, Sorry guess we should have warned you. This is Nancy my sister." Mike rolled his eyes.

"Yeah she is a cryokinetic." Dustin looked the teen with puppy eyes. "She is Mike's opposite. She has ice powers." Els eyes widened.

"Yeah, but i'm not a huge show off like you guys." Nancy chuckled.

"But you are the coolest!" Dustin yelled. "Get it guys? Coolest? Because she.. You know" The other boys groaned and rolled their eyes. Lucas shoved him.

El couldn't believe everything she was hearing. Her head was swimming. She had gone her entire life like thinking she was alone with her abilities. That she would always be an experiment gone wrong, and that no one would ever understand her or make her feel accepted. But she was in the presence of several others who all had wonderful and amazing abilities. They all cared for each other and maybe, just maybe it meant that they would care for her too.

"So Hop, do you think she can stay here.. With you?" Mike asked the gruff older man. He paused for a moment. He Knew this little girl was in some kind of serious trouble, and he was worried that the people she had run from might come looking for her. He considered El for a moment, and saw the pleading look on her face. He sighed, of course she could stay, and if anyone came for her they would leave in a body bag.

"Sure, Kid. Glad to have you." He gave her a heartfelt smile. The group cheered, even Lucas, and Mike patted her softly on the back.

This entire world was unknown to her. She had a lot to learn, an unfathomable amount to learn. But she wasn't scared. For the first time in as long as she could remember, El wasn't scared. She liked these people, and she liked that she wasn't alone. She was ready to learn, and even excited for the future. This was a new feeling for El, and she didn't know what to call it. She pondered, looking over the

smiling faces of her new.. Friends? Yes. Friends. She reveled in the moment, the laughter, and the warm sun beating down on her for the first time and she understood this feeling. El was hopeful. And it felt amazing.

## 4. Chapter Four: Learning

The pile of clothes Nancy had left on El's bed was a bit overwhelming. For most of her life she had only been permitted to wear hospital gowns or thin grey pajamas. Nancy's clothes were colorful, and exciting and El didn't know where to start. She dove in, trying on everything and doing her best to put an outfit together the way Nancy had shown her.

Finally after nearly an hour, and a bit of frustration with a particularly tight turtleneck, El found a dress she really liked. It was pink and long sleeve, with a cute white collar. It made El feel quite... Pretty. She smiled at herself in the mirror and topped her outfit off with a pair of white knee high socks, and Mike's old tennis shoes.

"What is taking her so long?" Lucas groaned, tossing a ball of whirring light up in the air like a tennis ball.

"Well she is a girl." Dustin added.

"Yeah but she isn't a regular girl, she doesn't even have hair!" Lucas scoffed.

"Lucas, will you shut u-" Mike stopped mid response as his gaze fell on the small girl walking down the house steps.

El was positively radiant. For the first time since the boys had found her she seemed comfortable in her own skin. Confident even. Mike flushed, his heart beating faster, and he tried to compose himself.

"Wow El! You look.." Dustin hollered, smile wide.

"Pretty..." Mike interrupted shyly. Now it was El's turn to blush. Lucas and Dustin shared a confused glance. Did Wheeler just call her 'pretty'? Like some kind of sap?

"Pretty?" El asked hopefully.

"Beautiful!" Nancy walked in the back door and clapped her hands together. "El you clean up nicely! You look like a real lady." El beamed.

"Hey boys? Hop needs your help out back. He is trying to get his truck to turn over and needs Dustin to crawl inside or something." She shrugged and held the door open. The boys reluctantly followed her outside; Aside from Mike who was lost in thought, looking adoringly at Eleven.

He felt that his feet, and eyes, were glued to their spot. The truth was that he did feel like a sap around her. He thought that the excitement from having a new, pretty, girl as a friend would wear off; But now that she had been with them for almost a week the intensity of his feelings had only grown. His heart pained everytime he looked at her, and on more than one occasion his head had actually burst into flames while thinking about her. He was in deep. Too deep to realize that everyone else had left, leaving him and El alone.

"Mike?" She woke him from his daydream and he turned to her.

"Yeah El?"

"Truck?" She asked. Mike was acting strange.

"Oh! Um no. I'm not very good with that stuff." He blushed bright red. "The last time I tried to help I almost blew Hopper to pieces. We thought his eyebrows would never grow back." He chuckled dryly.

El pondered for a moment. She had learned a lot in the week since starting her new life. The boys had taught her all about board games and movies. Nancy helped her decorate her new room, and was teaching El a lot about being a girl. Dustin liked to tell her about space and the stars, he was really smart. Maybe he really was the ideas guy. Lucas had been harder to get along with, he really seemed skeptical of everything El had been through, but even he was willing to teach her what it meant to be a member of the 'party'. Even Hopper turned out to be a truly spectacular father figure, or 'brat-wrangler' as he so often put it. But truthfully, Mike was her favorite new friend. Mike had shown her his favorite comic books and action figures, it made her giggle when he made funny voices. He made her heart flutter in the most unusual way, and he was always so patient with explaining things she didn't understand. When El had gotten scared by a nightmare, Mike had built her a fort in the basement. They stayed up all night while Mike answered any and every question

she had. She really liked all of her new friends, but what she felt for Mike was different, she just didn't quite understand why he was always so nice to her.

She shook her head, heavy with her swarming thoughts.

"What should we do?" She asked.

"Um... well I should probably finish writing my campaign," Mike had tried his best to explain the complex game of Dungeons and Dragons, but it was still pretty over her head. "You can come sit in the basement with me." He smiled hopefully. El nodded and together they headed into the houses lower floor.

Mike quickly got to work, reading through several large binders, filled with epic tales about hideous monsters and bountiful treasure. El thought it was sweet, how excited he got whenever he came across and picture or a paragraph he thought she would like. Mike was so smart, and so creative.

El sat across from the boy in her fort, she played with the fraying ends of blanket and let her mind wonder.

She hadn't let herself think much about her old life in the last few days. Her time was far too consumed with absorbing as much of the world around her as possible. Every scent, every color, every sound. It was all so unfamiliar and exciting. She still had her fears about Papa and the other men at the lab; And her nightmares were a painful reminder that they were still hunting her. On more than one occasion Hopper had woken up to the sobbs coming from the room next to him, and on more than one night he had to read a story to the weeping girl. He knew her concern was justified when he began seeing black cars following him in town.

Hopper had taken some precautions in making sure they couldn't find her. He set up several traps called 'trip wires' around the property, and put a few ground rules in place. El wasn't allowed out during the daytime, in case someone should see her. She also couldn't go anywhere unless she was accompanied by one or more of the boys. It did get lonely sitting home alone all day while everyone else went to school, but El had lots of new ways to fill her time.



Hopper left for work everyday early in the morning, he was the town police chief. El knew that meant that he protects people, that he fought the bad men. He usually didn't come home until late in the evening. He was a hard worker, El thought. It amazed her, the first time she saw what his powers allowed him to do. He lead the boys in training most days after school, and to him 'light exercise' meant 20 reps while lifting one of the old junk cars outside. Hopper was a good person, he was gruff and stern most of the time but he had a great heart.

Mike had told El the long story about how his and Nancy's parents started treating them horribly once their powers developed. They didn't want monsters for children. He actually teared up, recounting the day things took a turn for the worse, and his dad hit him because he accidentally burnt a hole in his sweater. Not knowing what else to do they walked to the police station, and that is how they met Hopper. Mike and Nancy still lived with their parents most of the time, if you could call it living, but they spent almost every chance they got at Hops. He never imagined he would become an honorary foster parent, but growing up with parents who never understood his powers, he knew he needed to give these kids a chance at living normal, happy lives. El remembered the way Mikes tears turned into hot steam when they rolled down his face.

Hopper kept his family, and his powers, a secret from the rest of the town. To everyone else he was just a divorced bachelor with more than average strength. No one knew he went home every night to the old farm house on the far side of town full of supernatural teenagers, or that he could lift a truck with minimal effort.

Steve also kept his abilities hidden, no one would believe he had the ability to move so quickly that it literally frayed the atoms of the space around him. He was the son of a very affluent family, and to everyone in town he was just a normal, popular pretty boy. He also delivered Pizzas a couple of towns over. His employer was always quite astonished at his ability to deliver orders at a rate that seemed faster than humanly possible, but no one questioned him. They boys didn't seem to found of him, or the way he snuck into Nancys room in the middle of the night, but he was a member of the group nonetheless. El had heard nancy on the phone with her friend Barb a

few times groaning about how 'Steve was just an idiot, and the only reason he liked her was because they shared this horrible secret.' It confused El, how you would like someone enough to kiss them and hold their hand but not trust them

Lucas and Dustin were lucky enough to have fairly oblivious parents. But it wasn't infrequent for one of them to come to Hoppers house angry and cursing because of some terrible thing their parents had said to them, especially Lucas. While Dustin only lived with his cooky and air-headed mother, Lucas lived with a family who expected a lot from him. As if being a dorky science nerd with no aptitude for athletics wasn't hard enough, he had to have these strange powers too. He was a disappointment in his father's eyes. It saddened El when they were gone during the school week, and that they had a hard time being accepted at home, but they spent nearly every moment of free time at her house, so she couldn't complain much.

They boys and Nancy did there best to control themselves at school. There were rumors, of course, about them having strange abilities, but mostly everyone just chalked it up to them being freaks. El was furious the day Mike came home with a scrape on his chin. She swore she would get revenge on the bullies who had pushed him, but he chuckled and told her that they looked a lot worse than he did. How had that mysterious fire started on Troys arm? No one knew.

El hoped that one day she would be able to go to school with the boys, and protect them, but she knew she still had a lot to learn before that day would ever come. They loved teaching El, and they came home every evening brimming with excitement to tell her what they had learned that day. Mike and Nancy had given her old textbooks, and El did her best to read them; but the little world in black and white was so much less captivating than the world around her. She had broken Hoppers rule a few times, just so she could go out and lay in the tall grass, and make shapes from the clouds.

Everything about her new life was wonderful. It filled her with hope and elation. It almost made her dizzy. She had spent so long in an arid white prison, full of heartache and alienation. But now her world was awash in brilliant colors, and it filled her with a warm, cozy feeling. She was so lost in reflection that she didn't realize the warm boy, kneeling down beside her.

"El?"

She jumped, his voice snapping her back to reality. "Mike."

"What are you thinking about?" He smiled. Her heart danced in her chest.

She considered his words for a second, and then she answered honestly.

"You." Her face was serious, but her arms felt like jello. Mike's speckled cheeks turned pink and he grinned wider.

"What about me?" He pressed.

"You make me happy." It made her feel good to see him beaming down at her. She hoped that Mike's feelings mirrored her own. She may have not known exactly what her feelings were, but Mike had always answered any question she had; So why not this one? She sat up, face to face with the curly haired boy, and resigned herself to ask him, even if she didn't know exactly how.

"Mike?"

"Yeah El?"

"I..." Suddenly the door to the basement flew open, and Dustin's roaring laughter echoed through the small space. Mike and El jumped apart, faces flush with embarrassment.

Mike cursed under his breath at his friend. He had been trying to work up the courage to tell El how he felt about her. He sighed and sat back down at the D&D table. He kicked himself for getting so hung up about her. 'She probably doesn't even feel the same way' He thought to himself, shoving campaign notes back into their binder. 'She probably doesn't even know what these feelings mean.'

If only he knew how wrong he was.

## 5. Chapter Five: Fire Boy

"Whose turn is it to do the dishes?" Nancy yelled from the kitchen at the group of boys all sitting silently in a food coma on the couch.

"I think it's Steves." Dustin finally answered.

"Yeah, totally Steves." Mike added.

"Steve!" Nancy yelled up the stairs. In a flash Steve was in the kitchen, arms wrapping around his girlfriend.

"Yeah yeah I got it." Steve was a blur of moving limbs and pacing to and from the sink. In less than the time it took for Nancy to walk up stairs the kitchen was spotless, and Steve was right on her heels.

"Wow." El breathed. Steves incredible speed still amazed her. It sure made doing chores look a lot easier.

"You get used to it." Lucas belched. "So who wants to go on a walk?" Lucas hopped off the couch and slipped into his jacket. Dustin joined him and Mike turned to El.

"We go on late night walks pretty often, El. You should come with us its fun." He smiled warmly.

"Yeah it gives us a chance to have a little freedom." Lucas added.

"We know some pretty cool places. In fact we were on our way this awesome pond the night we found you." El looked up at Mike. She remembered their distant chatter and flash lights just a few weeks before. She stood up and slipped on her new handed down shoes.

The boys all bundled up and when they realized El didn't have a warm enough jacket yet, Mike offered her one of his. It was a bit too big but he liked the way she looked in it, and El liked that it smelled like Mike. Like smoke and pine trees.

---

The boys and El walked across the large field at the back of the house, and into the darkened woods. They knew these tangled trails

very well and in no time they were walking up on a small pond in the middle of the forest. El's breath hitched when she realized it was the same pond she had drank from, and cleaned her dirty hands in during her stay in the forest. It was hard to believe so little time had passed; it felt like she had been living with her new friends her whole life.

"Alright everyone spread out and look for firewood." Mike said pointing a flashlight at the ground. They spent another half hour collecting dry logs and twigs, and setting them up in a cone shaped pile near the water. The pile grew larger and larger until Mike decided it was finally the right size and he got to work. He held out his hands and breathed the fire to life. El basked in the warmth, and the orangey hue that fell over the area. It was beautiful, just like the boy who created it.

Dustin had packed the stuff to make after dinner s'mores, and the kids got busy toasting marshmallows. El mastered the art quickly, because she could hold the marshmallow with her mind, turning it slowly right over the coals to get that perfect golden color. Dustin was overjoyed and demanded that El make all of his smores for him. She happily obliged, it felt nice to be able to help a friend, even if it was just something as silly as toasting marshmallows.

"You know El..." Dustin said with a mouthful of graham cracker. "I'm really glad we found you in the woods." The last word sent a spray of crumbs out of his mouth. El giggled and hugged her knees to her chest.

"Me too." She said honestly, although 'glad' didn't even come close to the gratitude she felt.

"Yeah even if you are a weirdo, it's nice to not be the newby anymore." Lucas added, throwing his sticky roasting stick into the fire.

"New-by?" El asked.

"Newby. It means new to something." Mike quickly answered.

"Before you came alone I was the last one to develop my powers." Lucas sunk into himself, and gazed into the fire. "Mike and I have

been friends since kindergarten, and then Dustin came along in the fourth grade and I totally got left behind. I thought it was because they didn't like me anymore but it turns out it's because they both had powers already and could confide in each other. My dad was thrilled, he thought I would find normal friends and be the normal person he wanted me to be but then boom. My powers came along and I was even more of a freak than before." Lucas played absentmindedly with the dirt at his feet. The other boys hung their heads in a mixture of shame and resentment.

"Not a freak." El shook her head. Lucas was the furthest thing from a freak. He was funny, and talented, and smart. His powers were amazing, and he was a good friend, even if he was rude to El. It suddenly made sense, his distaste for her, he hated the part of himself that made him different, the part of him that his parents didn't understand, and El was just another reminder of that.

"Maybe not to you." He sighed.

"No, Lucas. You are not a freak. You are a good person. You are a good friend. Your dad is a freak because he does not see you are special" El's tone was firm but sweet. She meant every word of it.

Lucas stared back at her bewildered, in fact all of the boys did. This was maybe the longest sentence El had ever said, and although it was a bit chopped up, it was completely heartfelt and personal. Even if Lucas didn't quite believe it himself, he knew that she meant it, and maybe that was enough for him to feel like he didn't have it so bad.

After everyone was stuffed yet again, Lucas and Dustin decided to play a game of 'Optic Frisbee'. Dustin turned into a tail wagging golden retriever and they all laughed when he jumped too far to the right and fell into the shallow water. He shook off his wet fur, splattering muddy water all over the other young teens.

"God, gross Dustin!" Mike yelled, wiping mud off his pants. Luckily he always had tissues in his pocket in case El had one of her famous nose bleeds. By the time he and El had cleaned themselves, and Dustin was done laughing, the fire had dwindled substantially.

"Will you guys go get some more wood, the fire is going down."

"Well then make it bigger." Lucas sneered.

"I can't just 'make it bigger' Lucas is needs fuel." He emphasized his point by making the flames flare up and out. The coal sputtered and cracked and the fire fell to only a small flicker. Lucas rolled his eyes and he and Dustin ran back into the surrounding woods.

Mike turned to look at El. She was resting her head on her knees, and gazing sleepily into the fire. His heart rate quickened at the sight of her, wrapped in golden light. Her bruises and cuts were all but completely healed. Her face looked far less hollow than it did before, and her eyes were no longer sunken in or sullen. She turned and smiled at him, and he found himself getting lost in her dark eyes.

She made him feel like he was flying. From the moment he met her he knew she was special, and he knew he was prepared to do anything for her. It wasn't because she was needy, or couldn't take care of herself, because in a lot of ways she was stronger than him. It was because despite everything she had been through, every horrible experiment, every terrifying experience, she was still so hopeful, and brave, and full of life. Mike couldn't even dream up in his worst nightmares some of the things she had to endure, and what she had been able to tell him was too painful to believe; and yet she flourished.

He realized that he had been staring at her for longer than he meant too when she giggled at him. She still had a small spot of blood just above her lip from making smores and Mike reached out to wipe it.

"Oh. Sorry." Her head drooped in embarrassment.

"No it's okay! It's just a side effect. Of your powers I mean. We all get them."

"Really?" Her eyes widened.

"Yeah. I'm sure you've noticed that If i'm not careful I get burns on my hands and arms. Sometimes If i'm really mad it leaves scars." He rubbed the small white bumps on his wrists. "I have to be careful to control myself, because they can get pretty ugly."

"No Mike. Not ugly." El reached out and touched the tender skin. It sent a wave of goosebumps up his arm. "Pretty."

"You think *i'm* pretty?" He chuckled. She nodded strictly and squeezed his hand.

The truth was that Mike got angry more often than he would like to admit. He used to spend hours in the forest burning trees, and shrubs, and anything unlucky enough to be in his way. He would scream and cry and light fires he had no way of controlling. He was angry for a lot of reasons, but mostly he was just full of intense hatred. He hated his parents for being so cold and distant, and he hated himself for being the cause. He was unlovable and completely convinced that Hopper only cared for him because it was his job. He would come home late at night, covered in fresh blisters and Nancy would patch him up. She would cry and hold him and tell him it would all be okay. But it never was. Not until he met El anyway.

Her life had been so much harder than his, and she was okay, so maybe he would be too. He strived to get better because he knew it would scare her to see him that way. He strived to forget the way his parents treated him, and he hoped one day he would be able to forgive himself.

"El..." He leaned in closer to her. She could feel the warmth radiating from him, it was hotter than the fire itself. She felt drawn to lean forward too, like they were being pulled together by some invisible rope. Her heart beat so loud and fast she was sure Mike would be able to hear it. They stopped moving, only inches apart when Mike spoke again.

"El you are the most beautiful girl I have ever seen." Mike said so softly it was almost a whisper. If it weren't for their closeness she wouldn't have been able to hear him; but she did and she smiled. Mike couldn't believe what was happening. He was nose to nose with a girl. And not just any girl; a beautiful, talented, funny, and heroic girl. She was perfect. He was so consumed in this thoughts that he didnt notice he was slowly closing the gap between them. He didn't notice he was putting his hand on her cheek, or that they were both closing their eyes until the moment their lips touched. He felt a pang of electricity shoot through his body, and a another wave of



goosebumps rippled across his skin. El sunk deeper into his kiss. She had seen this happen in a movie, and it felt a thousand times better than it looked. She could practically hear the orchestra swelling, and the fireworks exploding.

El knew that kissing wasn't something you did with regular friends, kissing was for someone more special than that; and to her Mike was that person. Her new life was amazing, so full of wonderful new experiences, and heartfelt compassion, and Mike was the center of it all.

A distant dog bark brought the teens back to reality. They quickly pulled away and returned to their spots apart from each other. Their faces red, and smiles dopey. Mike pinched himself just to make sure it wasn't all a wonderful dream.

Lucas and Dustin returned with more wood, and Mike got the fire going again. Actually he had trouble keeping it contained, he was just too excited for some reason. Once everyone started getting tired, El pushed the smoldering logs into the pond and Mike again wiped the trickle of blood from her lip. They walked back to the house, enjoying the quiet silence of the forest. Mike and El lingered a few paces behind so he could hold her hand without the pestering from his friends.

That night El and Mike had another long discussion in her fort, this time about the intricate Star Wars Universe. El laughed at his excitement while breaking down the epic battle scenes. It was nearly morning by the time they drifted off to sleep. El head resting on Mike's shoulder, and her hand lightly gripped in his.

## 6. Chapter Six: Camp Freak

"Guys! About forty yards north!" Dustin hollered from the top of a tall oak tree. He had turned into a bear cub and ran ahead to scout out the perfect location for the party camping trip. "It's a clearing by the creek!"

Mike, Lucas, and El followed down the trail according to Dustins instructions and before noon they began to set up camp. Lucas and El tackled the tents, Dustin was in charge of food, and of course Mike built the fire. At first the idea of voluntarily spending the night out in the woods had sounded terrible to Eleven, but now that she was setting up camp, and enjoying the beauty of their hike, it didn't seem so bad. It was a bit early in the season but it was one of the warmest springs on record, and the boys were too excited to show El that the outdoors could be fun, not just scary and lonely. Hopper had been reluctant to bend the rule of El going out during the day time, but the boys promised to stay deep in the remote regions of the forest.

After camp was finished, the young teens changed into swimsuits and spent a long afternoon splashing in the creek. Dustin dove in and out of the water as a myriad of freshwater fish, and Lucas made himself a warm, quiet humming, inner tube that he quickly fell asleep in. The sight of El, giggling and carefree, made Mike's heart race. The water around him began to steam every time she came near him.

When the sun began to set, Dustin got started preparing a hotdog fiest. Mike and El shared a towel by the fire, their hair was frizzy from the water, and their cheeks reddened from the sun. The boys debated whether or not to take a night hike.

"What do you think El?" Mike asked. She thought about it for a moment. It was starting to get cold, and she was tired, but she loved hiking with her friends, and Mike thought it was a good idea so surely it must be.

"Lets go."

They set off clad in warm sweaters. Mike held his hand out like a steady torch in front, his other hand tangled in Els. She was thankful

for his warmth whenever the wind picked up. They walked for just over an hour, admittedly closer to town than they should have been, but completely lost in conversation. El relished the sounds of her friends banter, and the calming chorus of crickets and owls. It was almost perfect, all felt right in the world.

But then she heard it.

Distant and haunting, so faint she almost thought she had imagined it. But then she heard it again and she knew it was real. As if he could read her mind, Dustin stopped dead in his tracks.

"Do you guys hear that?" He whispered.

"Hear what?" Mike and Lucas said simultaneously.

"Its crying." El answered. The party stilled for a long time trying to hear the source of the sound. Dustin shifted into a stout hunting dog and raised an ear into the air. He barked once and bounded off in the direction he heard it coming from. The others followed closely behind, trying not to trip on tree roots. They finally caught up with their canine friend who was pointing his snout directly ahead in the direction of a ramshackle fort. The crying was much louder now, and much more upsetting. It was the kind of guttural desperate sobbing that only El could relate to. No one quite knew what to do, so they stayed still and listened for a long time before El stepped forward. Slowly, as too not make a sound, she crossed the space towards the fort.

"Hello?" She said as softly as she could manage.

"He... Hello? Mom?" The voice replied from inside. It was the voice of a young boy, probably the same age as the party, but it was hard to tell.

"Not mom." El said taking another step forward.

"Who... Who are you?" He sounded afraid.

"A friend." El knew that any person who felt as bad as this boy sounded, as bad as she had felt all those months ago, just needed a place to feel cared for. "Can I come in?"

There was a long pause before the boy spoke again. "Yes."

El walked around to the front of the fort. It had a thick tarp door and a small hand painted sign that read 'Castle Beyers'. El pulled back the tarp and looked in on the boy, but she found no one there.

"Hello?" She asked worriedly.

"Im... I'm here." He replied. The other boys moved closer to the fort aswell, after all, they had no way of known just who or what was inside.

"Are you hiding?" El moved inside the fort. She could hear his shaky breathing, but it didn't seem like a large enough space for someone to be completely out of sight.

"Kind of. When I get scared... It just kind of happens." He sucked in a deep breath and tried to compose himself. When he exhaled, El was stunned to watch the small boy take shape before her eyes. He was small, much smaller than her friends, and his eyes were swollen. He had dark purple bruises around one of his eyes and a crust of dry blood under his nose.

"You have powers?" El gasped.

"I guess you could call it that. It feels more like a curse to me." The boy hung his head, tears welled up in his eyes once again.

"El who is it?" Mike called from just outside the fort.

"Is.. is that Mike Wheeler?" The boy looked terrified. Why would he be scared of Mike? "He... He cant see me, he can't know." The boy started to panic, he began disappearing again and in just a few seconds, El found herself seemingly alone in his fort.

"Come back! Please its okay. Mike wont hurt you." El pleaded, reaching out and placing a hand on his unseeable knee.

"El whats going on." Mike asked again, clearly worried. He peeled back the tarp and glanced inside.

"He is scared so he is hiding." Her face was full of concern.

"Um.. Its okay, whoever you are, you don't have to be afraid. We want to help." Mike was clearly confused. He didn't see anyone other than El, but he could hear the boys breathing.

"Do you promise?" The boy finally spoke, still camouflaged.

El gently squeezed his knee. "Promise."

Just as before, he breathed himself back into existence. Mike couldn't believe what he was seeing. It wasn't just any sad or lost child, it was someone he knew. It was Will Byers, *and* he had powers. Mike had known Will since they were both in kindergarten, he considered him a friend. They used to be much closer before Mike developed his abilities. He remembered it was around that time that Will started acting strange and distant; he must have come into his as well, Mike thought.

"Mike please don't tell anyone." Will begged. Mike noticed the fresh bruising, he was in serious trouble. "Everyone already thinks im a freak, you really can't tell."

"Will you don't have to worry. I won't tell anyone." Mike smiled. "I know how you feel."

"How?" Will asked incredulously.

"Because I have powers too. We all do." Mike lifted his hand and flicked a small flame on his fingertips. Wills eyes shot open at the flame.

"Wait... We?" Will looked from Mike to El. She gave an affirming nod, and silently lifted Wills supercom into the air, it floated delicately just above his lap. Will tentatively reached out and grabbed it.

"And Dustin and Lucas too. They are outside." Mike lifted the tarp door again to reveal his friends. They had their ears practically pressed against the door and fell into the forts entrance when it moved. They scrambled to sit up, shoving each other, and trying not to look guilty.

"I had no idea. I thought it was just my family." Will shook his head, clearly overwhelmed.

"Your family? Johnathan too?" Mike asked. Jonathan and Nancy had been friends in middle school, but he hadn't seen him in a long time.

"Yeah and my mom." He hugged his knees. "But my dad... he doesn't like it. He treats us all like monsters."

El knew that feeling all too well. Suddenly it all clicked. Will's dad, his *Papa*, had been the one to make him cry. To make him hide in the dark woods, to give him that bruise. She clenched her teeth together in anger.

"Your dad is a bad man." She looked deeply into his eyes. He nodded.

"We won't let him hurt you again." Mike patted Wills clasped hands

"Especially if he doesn't have powers. We can kick his ass if he ever tries anything." Lucas punched his open palm for emphasis.

"I don't think I can stand up to him. He is so angry... He was just screaming and throwing things and he pushed Johnathan up against the wall. I just said to let him go." He started crying again, wiping at the blood from his nose. "He hit me so hard. He has never done that before. My mom and him split up years ago but he still comes into town every few months and does this. And I just left my mom in there with him. He is the monster! Not me."

El smoothed Wills hair, the way Mike always did for her when she cried. The boys grumbled amongst themselves about what to do. To everyone's surprise it was Dustin who stood up first.

"Let's go teach that son of a bitch a lesson."

---

It was a quarter past 11 when the group reached the Beyer's residence. Even from across the yard, in the quiet of the night, they could hear muffled yelling, and doors slamming. El had been holding Wills hand the entire walk, because she knew how much it always helped her feel safe when Mike held hers.

"I don't know if I can go in there." Will said after a long bout of silence.

"You can." Lucas stepped forward. "And we will be right behind you to back you up."

Will took a deep breathe and El squeezed his hand. "Okay. Lets go."

The walked up the hill and onto the back porch. The kitchen door was hanging ajar but Wills hand froze mid air, to scared to touch it. El flicked her head and the door slammed open. Every ounce of fear in Wills body was matched with rage in the hearts of his new friends. They were determined. The party walked inside to find the kitchen in shambles; Plates broken on the floor, chairs knocked over, and a cold dinner left uneaten. Somewhere down the hallway a door slammed.

"Come back here when i'm talking to you!" A man's voice ripped through the house. Will jumped.

"Leave him out of this Lonnie!" Joyces voice was filled with desperation.

Jonathan took the argument straight into the dining room. He stomped towards to back door but stopped short when he saw his house was full of strange children. He opened his mouth to ask what was going on but Lonnie was right on his heels.

"Don't you walk away from m-" He turned to the party. "What the hell is this?"

Will inched forward, trying to say something, anything, but his words felt bitter on his tongue. He dropped Els hand and balled his own into a fist.

"I said what the hell is this!?" He rushed forward, pushing past a dumbfounded Jonathan, and grabbed onto Wills shirt. "Answer me dammit! Be a god damn man and answer me!" He raised his other hand into the air in a violent fist. It was like time slowed to a screeching halt, the party watched in a mixture of horror and anger.

And suddenly the room sprang into action.

Will disappeared, and slipped from his father's clutches. Mikes arms erupted in flames, he pushed in front of El and shot a hot blast of fire into Lonnie's chest. He screamed and fell backwards into the wall. El

lifted her hand, and lowered her gaze. Lonnie lifted effortlessly into the air, struggling for breath.

"You... You Are freaks... like them." He choked out.

"Maybe we are freaks!" Lucas hollered. "But I'd rather be a freak than an asshole." He conjured a buzzing rope of light, and wrapped it around Lonnie's dangling arms. El lowered him to the ground and Lucas tied it off. Out of El's clutches he could finally breathe, but he was nowhere near free. Joyce rounded the corner, she looked on the scene before her in confusion.

"Will, what's happening?" She moved towards her son.

"Dad?" Will stepped forward, determination filled his eyes. "You need to leave."

"Are you and your little freak friends gonna make me, faggot?" Lonnie sneered.

"Yes, we are." Will hardened his jaw.

"Joyce control your son so I don't have too." He turned towards his mother, constricted by Lucas's light constructs. Joyce stepped forward, as if to help him, but stopped when she saw the look on Will's face, and the bruise on his eye.

"No Lonnie. He is right, you need to leave." She crossed her arms.

"I'm not going anywhere you crazy bitch!" He spit at her. Lucas pulled the ropes tighter.

"It doesn't really seem like you have a choice." Jonathan joined his mother in the kitchen, face unreadable.

"You can either go willingly, or we can make you." Mike's hands were still burning, and so were his eyes.

Lonnie looked up at his attackers. He searched from one set of eyes to the next, all focused on him, all full of justified hatred. He was gravely outnumbered, and not nearly strong enough to stand up to anyone of them, let alone an entire gang, and he knew it.



"Fine i'll go." He spit. "Why the hell would I want to stay here anyway? In a family of monsters?"

"No Lonnie! You're the monster." Joyce grabbed his collar, face reddened in anger. "Now get the hell out of my house!"

Lucas heald his palms out flat and pulled his constructs back into himself. Lonnie crumpled to the floor weak and shaking. He stumbled up towards the front door, but turned back one last time to look at his family.

"You're gonna regret this Joyce. I'm not coming back this time. You need me here, you aren't shit without me."

"Lonnie, I haven't needed you for a long time! You made the choice to leave the first time, but this time it isn't up to you. This time I am dead serious." She stood inches away from his face, speaking through her teeth. "I don't want you coming anywhere near my boys ever again."

He opened his mouth to speak, but decided better of it. He turned, grabbed his keys from next to the door, and stormed out. It was true, that this had been a long time coming, and it wasn't the first time he had been kicked out. But this time he knew Joyce meant it. A part of him knew he had gone too far, but he wouldn't give her that satisfaction.

The house was silent until they heard his tires screeching out of the driveway, and head down the street. Joyce hugged her sons, and the family shared a long, hard, much needed cry. The party awkwardly shifted around the kitchen, unsure of what to do or when to leave.

"Okay." Joyce sighed. "I think you all have *a lot* to explain here." She turned to the group of strange children. They all mumbled over each other, trying to recount the story.

"It's alright, Mom. We will tell you everything." Will interjected. "They are my new friends."

## 7. Chapter Seven: Mouthbreathers

**Hello everyone! Thank you to those who commented, it really helps me out so please keep it up! This chapter was a fun little nod to the very iconic bully scene from season one, but with a very 'strangerpowers' twist. I hope you enjoy!**

Spring was blooming to life in the quiet town of Hawkins Indiana. Everything from the ground, to the trees, to the forest, and even the sky, seemed to be teeming with newly awakened life. To some, the seasons changed unnoticed, just another March, just another day, but to others it was miraculous. Eleven was one of the latter.

Since the first day she saw the tiny green buds on neighboring trees, she was obsessed with spring. Everyday she demanded that Mike take her on a walk, and tell her all about different animals and plants. He had checked out a few field guides and plant identification books from the library, and she quickly learned the names of every flower, shrub, and tree with a 100 mile radius (in English and Latin). Mike thought it was sweet how invested she was learning, and it had given him a new appreciation for the world around him.

Before now, Mike was just some nerdy kid who got picked on at school, loved science and D&D, and sometimes accidentally lit things on fire. He had been bitter, and moody and seldom did he venture outside his comfort zone. The truth was that he often felt alone, before Eleven. Sure he had his party, and he knew they would always be there for him, and sure he had the support of his sister, and Hop; But it just wasn't quite enough.

That was, until El arrived.

While Mike had parents so distant they may as well not even exist, El never had any at all. From the day she was born she was someone else's property. She wasn't even allowed to a human, let alone a child. It was mesmerizing, to watch her grow and learn and become the young woman she should have always been. She absorbed everything like a sponge, she was brilliant even if she couldn't always explain her thoughts and feelings the way she wanted too. She made Mike remember what it meant to be a kid again, to marvel at fireflies, and

sunsets, and ice cream. She needed him, and more than the both of them knew, he needed her too. She filled that nagging hole in his chest just with her presence, and her smile.

To them it was all new and confusing. Mike knew that when you liked a girl, and you kissed her, then you should ask her to be your girlfriend. But El wasn't just any regular girl, how could she fully understand the way Mike felt? And how could he know if she felt the same way? To everyone else it was painfully obvious they were meant for each other, and painfully disgusting to watch them fawn over each other all the time.

Hopper caught on right away, and made El switch rooms with him so he would be in between her room and the guest room Mike often slept in. He thought it would put an end to their sneaking to each other in the middle of the night, but all it really did was make them learn how to be quiet about it. It was mostly harmless, the relationship they shared. Honestly, El just wanted to be *near* Mike, and vice versa. She had gone her entire life with the only physical care shown to her was being put in bed by Papa when she was too weak from training to walk. Mike, being a young man, had obvious thought and *feelings* around El during their late night rendezvous, but he was more than content to just talk with her, or have her fall asleep with her head resting on his shoulder.

The season ramped up quickly. Spring Break came and went, and before anyone knew it, it was time for finals. Nancy and the Boys crammed as much as they could for their big tests, and El tried her best to help. Steve quite his job at the Pizzeria because his grades were teetering just on the brink of failure. Hopper had taken a short vacation so he could prepare himself for the 'busy season' when all the town kids wouldn't be in school and would be making a damn fool of themselves around Hawkins.

The kids ramped up quite a bit too. Lucas was growing into a handsome and quite muscular young man, all those hours of Optic Frisbee must do the body some good. Dustin had gotten much taller, and substantially less round; and most importantly his teeth started to coming in! Will was still on the shorter side, but his art skills were flourishing. Between his illustrations and Mike's story writing abilities they could be award winning comic book artists in no time. Mike was

growing like a weed. By May he was towering compared to Eleven, but neither of them complained. El's development was much more subtle, but in many ways far more important. Her hair had grown into a mess of short chocolate curls. She was no longer stick thin, or sickly pale, and her days alone allowed her to train her powers until she had a new found master over them. A mastery born of determination, and not one of fear.

The party had broken Hoppers rules a handful of times to take El to the creek, or the ice cream shop, or the arcade. They always took great care to make sure they weren't followed, and to take different ways home each time. Now that El had hair she looked quite different, but she always wore a pair of Nancy's sunglasses just in case.

On one of their outings the party had, unfortunately, been chased by the school bullies. They couldn't risk using their powers to defend themselves, and they knew nothing about actual physical fighting, so they ran through the forest, and onto the cliff above the quarry. The mouthbreathers circled them like sharks, pushing the party dangerously close to the cliff edge. El grabbed Mike's hand in fear, and tried to keep her footing.

"Ohh look at that, Troy!" One of the skulking boys called out. "Looks like Frog Face has a little freak girlfriend!" He paced up the couple, blowing stinking breath in their faces.

"She has got to be dumb as a post if she hangs around these losers." Troy sneered.

"Don't talk about her that way, asshole!" Mike yelled, adrenaline suddenly pumping through his veins. He could take bullying, but he wasn't about to let them treat El like that.

"What did you say to me, Frogface?" Troy's eyes filled with rage.

"You heard me, asshole!" Mike surprised himself, he hadn't stood up to them like this before.

"You gonna regret that when I cut your little frog tongue out you piece of shit!" Troy yelled, advancing suddenly and flipping a

switchblade from his pocket. The party shifted back even further along the cliff edge. Dustin's foot slipped on a patch of loose dirt and he started falling.

"Oh shit oh shit ohshitohshit!" Dustin screamed, waving his arms rapidly forward to try to regain his balance.

Lucas turned to grab him but the boys hands slipped through his fingers. Dustin rapidly plummeted toward the icy water bellow. His instincts took over, not caring if those mouthbreathers saw or not, and he turned swiftly into a crow just a few feet from the water's surface. He cawed in alleviated amusement and he flew back up towards his friends.

After he fell, all of the kids (Including Troy and James) ran to the ledge, glancing carefully over to get a good look at Dustin's eminent doom. They were dumbfounded when they saw nothing. No body, no splash, no screaming. Just a lonely crow swooping above the water. The party shared a relieved smirk, except for El.

"What the fu-?" James gaped. El turned to him, and in a flash, threw him backwards onto the hard ground. He gasped, having the wind knocked out him. Troy watched his friend, and turned to the strange girl in shock. She flicked her head at him and bent his arm backwards, breaking it with a horrible crunching sound, and sending his switchblade flying over the cliff edge. He screamed in pain, and fell to his knees.

"Go." Her voice was venomous and firm. Like a snake. Her eyes were like daggers. The boys scrambled up and away from the strange girl, running the best they could with their injuries. Dustin, still an unassuming bird, flew around the boys and squealed loudly just to mess with them. They ran into the forest, audible crying.

Dustin flew back to the party, he shifted back and was crying with laughter.

"That was so awesome! They looked like scared little girls!" The boys all cheered at El, high-fiving each other and patting her firmly. Her head felt heavy but she knew she had down the right things.

"Friends protect each other." She stated coolly.

"Yeah. Always." Mike smiled at her warmly.

The party walked back to Hop's quickly so El wouldn't get caught being out of the house. They spent the rest of the night watching movies until Dustin, Lucas and Will got picked up. Before leaving Will stopped and hugged El tightly. He had never done that before so it made her worried.

"You are a good friend, El. I hope you know that." And with that he turned and left. It made El feel on top of the world. She never thought she would be able to have friends, and she never knew she would be *good* at it. She smiled to herself and for what have been the millionth time she concluded that leaving the lab had been the best choice he ever made.

It was starting to look like a beautiful summer by the time the boys graduated Middle school. It was hard to believe it had only been seven months since they found El in the woods, because it felt like they had known her forever. She was a part of the family, a member of the party, and (if Mike could ever get the nerve to make it official) a wonderful girlfriend.

## 8. Chapter Eight: The Party

"Steve come on we are going to be late!" Nancy yelled up the stairs at her boyfriend. The young couple were headed to some girls 'End of the Year' party, and Steve was taking way too long on his hair.

"Okay okay here I come, we can't all be born beautiful." He zipped down the stairs and stood next to her in the kitchen.

"I just don't understand how someone who could lap a fighter jet can take so long getting ready." She played with a lock his perfectly manicured hair.

"I probably won't be home until late so after Hopper goes to bed will one of you unlock the door for me?" She asked the teens who were lounging around the living room. They mumbled a unified conformation in response. Her and Steve waved goodbye and headed out into the late June evening.

It was quiet for a few minutes, aside from the rambling cartoon noise that spilled from the TV, and Dustin slurping is soda.

"What should we do now?" Dustin asked from his place on the floor.

"Will should be here in minute and then we are going to watch Ghostbusters because El still hasn't seen it." Mike answered. As if on cue, a set of headlights poured in through the living room window.

The Byers family had become an essential addition to the Hawkins Supernatural team. Will and Jonathan fit in right away and started training with Hop and the other kids a couple of times a week. Within just the first few weeks Will was already able to make other small objects disappear by touching them, and he was getting much better at controlling his own vanishing when he was scared. Jonathan's gifts were unique and somewhat hard to describe, but had taken to calling them 'shadow manipulation', he wasn't always in the mood to train but he liked helping the kids work on their abilities instead. Jonathan and Nancy had become very close in the short time since the boys had found Will in the forest. They had always been close as children, and they had a lot of lost time to make up for.

Joyce came around pretty often too, and it was really nice for Nancy and El to have a somewhat motherly presence in their lives, especially one who could see into the future.

"Will!" The room announced in unison.

"Hey don't all jump on me at once, there is plenty to go around." Jonathan joked, quickly making his way into the house behind his younger brother.

"Oh hey Jonathan, sorry. We just thought you would be going to that party with Nancy and Steve."

Lucas replied.

"No, parties aren't really my thing. Mind if I watch the movie with you?" He nervously rubbed the back of his neck.

Mike and El scooted closer together on the couch to allow room for him. Dustin jumped up to make popcorn and everyone settled for a night in.

---

Meanwhile across town, the party of the year was in full swing.

Nancy followed her boyfriend around while he greeted anyone and everyone. She nervously held onto a solo cup filled with who knows what, and tried her best not to freeze its contents in her hands. They had only been there an hour when Steve got roped into a Keg-stand contest. Nancy got bored of watching the idiots she went to school with becoming drunken idiots, so she wandered her way into the kitchen and filled her cup for the fourth- or was it fifth?- time as the room got progressively more blurry around her.

She didn't come to parties like this very often. They made her tense, she was always worried about saying the wrong thing, or talking to the wrong person, or worst of all, slipping up and using her powers. She took another drink. Everyone around her was so vapid and shallow, almost every conversation she could listen in on was either gossip, or trash talk.

She walked, or rather stumbled, back outside to find Steve chatting



uncomfortably close with a girl Nancy recognized as the head cheerleader. She was being way too friendly, and Steve didn't seem to care one bit. Nancy clenched her cup tighter in her hand and puffed a harsh, icy breath out her mouth.

"Steve!"

He whipped around to see Nancy staggering towards him. She was wasted.

"Whoa whoa Nance! Let's get you inside, okay?" He jogged towards her and put an arm around her waist. She could hardly walk a straight line. They dodged around groups of people, and finally found an unoccupied bathroom. He led her inside and closed the door behind them.

"I turn my back for one second and you go get shit faced?" His tone was joking but his eyes were concerned.

"It's not like you care." She crossed her arms and sat on the bathtub edge. Steve could tell she was upset but it was hard to take her seriously when she was so wobbly.

"What do you mean? Of course I care." He leaned against the counter.

"Bullshit! You have all of your little stupid friends and all of the stupid bullshit girls think you are all hot. And you don't even care!" Suddenly every pent up feeling she had about him came spilling out. "Oh Steve is so perfect everyone loves King Steve! I know you only talk to me because you have too, because we share this secret but you don't even care!" She fought back tears and wavered on the tub edge.

"Nancy I don't understand where this is coming from? I thought we were having fun tonight."

"No you wanted to have fun tonight! I wanted to invite Jonathan but you said he couldn't come! You said he was weird and you made me come anyways and it sucks!" She pointed a finger at him and let herself cry.

"This is crazy, you are just drunk and w-"

"No Steve! You wanted this. Just get out." She stood up and used every bit of strength she had to shove him away from her towards the door. "Go!"

He looked at her for a long time, deciding what to do but ultimately he knew there was no sense in arguing with a drunk girl. He turned around and left, slamming the door behind him. Nancy sunk to the floor in tears, part of her wanted to run after him and apologize, but another part of her just wanted to hide.

She had meant what she said, she just wished she had been able to say it more clearly, and not black out drunk in a strangers bathroom. She cried for felt like an hour, although it was probably only a few minutes when she heard a group of girls talking outside the door.

"Did you guys see Steve?"

"Yeah that girl he brought got so wasted she couldn't even walk." They laughed.

"I know she spent like the entire night in the kitchen alone taking shots."

"Why did he even bring her? Everyone knows little miss perfect Wheeler is a total loser."

Nancy felt a rush of adrenaline shoot through her. She stood up and breathed a long sigh to steady herself, it came out like a snow cloud, letting delicate little flakes drift through the air to the floor below. She pushed open the door, practically knocking over the girls who had just been talking about her. She heard them laughing harder now, she heard it all the way down the hallway, and up the stairs until she found an empty room with a phone.

"I guess I'll get it." Jonathan sighed and stood up from his place on the couch. Almost all of the kids were asleep in the living room, aside from Will who was glued to the movie in front of him.

He walked into the kitchen where the phone was ringing and answered. He could hear muffled music and voices in the background.

"Hello?"

"Jonathan?" Her voice was badly slurred but he could tell it was Nancy.

"Yeah its me. Whats up are you okay?" He asked, suddenly worried.

"Yeah it's fine, can you just come and get me?" She tried her best to sound normal but even she knew she was failing miserably. Jonathan could hear the scratchiness in her voice like she had just been crying.

"No problem, I will be there in 30." He hung and practically ran outside to his car, hollering 'be right back!' over his shoulder as he left.

He sped the whole way. He and Nancy had gotten much closer over the last couple of weeks but he knew she had gone to the party with Steve, so it had to be serious if she was calling him. He pulled up and found her sitting outside on the curb. Her mascara was running down her cheeks, and her shirt had red stains on it from whatever spiked punch she had been sloppily carrying around. He walked around the car to help her inside. She didn't say very much, and before he even turned out of the neighborhood she was asleep.

He pulled into Hoppers driveway and shut off the engine. Nancy was mumbling to herself in here sleep. Something about Steve being bullshit, and the party, but mostly a lot of gibberish. There was, however, one word she repeated several times as clear as day.

"Jonathan." Her face was scrunched up in disgust but everytime she said his name she looked content, almost peaceful.

Jonathan walked around the car and picked up the drunken girl. She was limp in his arms, she reeked of booze and her skin was icy cold. The tears that streaked down her face had frosted over and her lips were almost blue. If he hadn't known better he would have thought she had hypothermia. He carried her inside, carefully stepping over the sleeping kids in the living room, and laid her in her bed.

He carefully pulled off her jacket and her shoes, and covered her with the warm comforter. She sighed a contented breath and sunk into her

breath. He turned to leave but she reached out and grabbed his jacket.

"Stay with me." Her eyes fluttered open just enough to look at him.

"I don't think I should-"

"Please." She breathed.

He looked at her for along time, contemplating what to do. Her eyes were closed again but her hand stayed tightly gripped on his coat hem. She probably didn't even know who was putting her to bed, she probably just thought it was Steve. But then again, what if she got sick in the middle of the night? What if she had alcohol poisoning or needed help getting to the bathroom? Better be safe than sorry.

He walked around to the other side of the bed and sat down next to her. He covered himself with a small knitted afghan and tried to get cozy next to her, even though the bed was tiny and he was anything but comfortable. She rolled over on her side facing him and after a few minutes she was quietly snoring. Her breath was icy cold. Jonathan looked down at her and watched her sleep for what felt like hours before he too finally started to drift to sleep.

---

Both teens jolted awake when Nancy's bedroom door flew open.

"Nanc-... What the hell?" Mike was standing in her doorway, looking stunned. Dustin and Will stood behind him, peering into the room over his shoulder, all of their jaws hung open.

"Shit Mike! Ever heard of knocking!?" Nancy jumped out of bed, stormed over the the door and slammed it closed in the boys faces. Her own face was beet red.

"Nancy im so sorry I shouldn't have stayed here, you just you asked me too and I just didn't want you to be sick or get hurt or something and I-" Jonathan stammered.

"Don't apologize! I honestly don't remember anything from last night, I should be thanking you for making sure I was okay." She smiled at him weakly, although her head was pounding.

"Yeah you were pretty wasted, what's the last thing you remember?" He stood up from her bed and smoothed out his messy hair.

"I remember going to the party, and spending all night in the kitchen while Steve... oh shit Steve! We got into a fight I think. I don't remember anything after that."

"I assumed that's what happened. You called me from the party and asked me to pick you up. You were crying and when I brought you back here you asked me to stay with you."

"Shit I better call him-" She started

"Uh hey Nancy?" Mike interrupted softly from behind the door.

She flung the door open. "What!?"

"Steve is here, he is pretty pissed. That's why I woke you up." Mike crossed his arms

"Shit." Nancy pushed past her brother and flew down the stairs, the boys were right on her heels, hoping to catch a glimpse of the impending drama. Jonathan took the hint and sluggishly followed the rest of the group downstairs.

Steve was standing outside, leaning against the porch railing, smoking a cigarette and looking bitter. He knew Nancy hated it when he smoked, but he really didn't care right now.

"Steve!" Nancy threw open the front door and walked to him. She could tell he was upset, and she hoped their fight hadn't been her fault but something told her it was.

"Well if it isn't Nancy Wheeler and her secret boyfriend." He flicked his cigarette into the grass and shoved his hands in his pockets.

"Steve what the hell are you talking about?" Nancy was shocked.

"You know exactly what I'm talking about. I'm talking about you, and that creepy perv over there, spending the night together." He pointed behind her at Jonathan who was lurking just inside the front door.

"Okay I don't know what you think happened, but its not like that! He just helped me get home and then stayed with me to make sure I didn't get sick!" She yelled.

"Nancy I saw you last night! After you freaked out at the party and took off, I came here to try to talk to you but you two were all cuddled up. You know I really didn't think you were like that, Nancy. I didn't peg you for a slut." He was looking down his nose at her, jaw clenched. Nancy couldn't believe her ears. She had never heard him speak this way before.

"Hey, man don't talk to her that way." Jonathan walked towards Steve, hands balled into fists.

"You know what, Byers, why don't you just stay out of this." Steve turned and pushed the taller boy backwards.

"Steve don't be stupid." Nancy yelled, grabbing Steves arm.

"You don't want to do that Harrington." Jonathan straightened up, stepping forward.

"Oh yeah? Why not?" Steve pushed him again. "You gonna do something about it?" He pushed him again, harder this time.

Jonathan staggered back a few steps. He looked between Steve and Nancy a few times, contemplating what to do. Nancy look mortified, and Steve looked smug. He licked his lips and took a step towards Jonathan.

"I said what are you gonna do?" He reached out and pushed him with both hands this time, sending him against the exterior wall of the house. "Freak."

The last word sent a sharp pain through Jonathan. In that moment he replayed every time he had been called that name, by his dad, by assholes at school, and now by the King of assholes himself. He lunged forward, shoving Steve off of the porch with his full force.

Steve flew backwards and landed in the dirt, before he had to time to react Jonathan was on top of him. Jonathan punched him square in the jaw, searing pain shot through Steves skull. He watched Jonathan

pull his fist backwards to land another blow but Steve was too quick.

In the blink of an eye Steve was standing up, his lip was already swollen and he tasted blood on his tongue. Nancy was screaming for both of them to stop but her voice sounded a thousand miles away. Steve rushed forward and punched Jonathan in the gut, the momentum of his speed sending the boy flying backwards farther into the field. Jonathan didn't even have a second to catch his breath before Steve was on him again, grabbing him by the collar and socking him in the eye, over and over again.

Jonathan's vision faded out as the pain spread through him. He could see this wasn't going to be a fair fight. He closed his eyes tightly, focusing his energy on the space around him. Jonathan didn't use his powers very often, but now it was completely instinctive.

Suddenly everything went black.

Jonathan struggled out of Steve's grasp and ran in the opposite direction, wanting to put some space between them. He knew that no amount of space would make a difference for Steve's speed. But no matter how fast you are, you can't fight what you can't see. Steve searched around looking for the boy who had cast them into darkness but it was no use, he was as good as blind. Jonathan intensified the shadow around both of them, moving forward again slowly as to not make a sound. He pulled his fist back and landed another punch on Steve's jaw. He fell backwards from the surprise and Jonathan fell with him. He hit him again and again, each time with more force, more anger. He actually lost count by the time Nancy intervened.

Jonathan felt a cold blast of ice wrap around his fist, and slowly the sensation traveled up his arm. He couldn't move either of his limbs and it broke his concentration. The thick black shadows faded away to reveal that his arms were cased in solid ice. Steve took shape underneath him, bruised and bloody and slipping out of consciousness.

"Stop it! Both of you!" Nancy shrieked.

Jonathan almost couldn't believe everything that had just happened. He had never been in a fight with anyone but his Dad before, and he

had certainly never punched back. Now here he was with blood on his knuckles, and someone else's face beaten to a pulp. Everything around him faded back into reality. The boys and El were watching in shock from the porch, and Nancy's hands were sputtering angry ice shards out across the grass. He stood up, letting Steve regain his footing.

"You deserve each other!" Steve spit. "You're both psycho!" He dusted the dirt off of his pants and walked to his car.

Jonathan watched him peel away, spraying dry dirt out from behind his tires as he drove off. Nancy walked towards him and released the ice from around his arms. His skin was blue and clammy, and it burned from the intense cold. He realized for the first time now that he was messed up pretty badly. His entire face felt swollen and tender, and he could feel blood dripping from under his eye.

"Jonathan." Nancy reached a hand out towards him but he shrugged it off.

He walked to his own car and opened the door before calling to Will to say he could stay another night if he wanted. The small boy nodded, still gawing, and Jonathan got inside the car and drove off. The entire drive home felt completely dazed, like it had all been some horrible dream, but the taste of blood in his mouth reminded him that it had been real.

He had just fought King Steve, and he had won. But more than that, he felt the nagging feeling that something was going on between Nancy and him, he just didn't know what.



## 9. Chapter Nine: The Fight

"Ow Ow Nancy be careful it hurts!" Mike yelled, wincing in pain as his sister tended his bandages.

"Well Michael, if you would learn to control your powers, and your anger, you wouldn't need me to do this at all." She tightly wrapped another layer of gauze around the young boys knuckles and secured it with tape. She sighed and stood up, ruffling her brothers hair.

"Yeah well.. Lucas started it!" Mike kicked the chair leg of his friend, who was currently sitting with his arms crossed and staring at the floor.

"Did not Wheeler! But I did finish it." Lucas sneered.

"You are a real asshole you know that!?" Mike stood up yelling.

"Oh yeah!?"

"Yeah!"

Will, El, and Dustin watched from across the kitchen, safely sitting out of range. The boys had been arguing all morning, and no one really seemed to know why. It was obvious that Mike was hot-headed, and that Lucas was too stubborn, but it just didn't make sense why they were so on edge. Dustin tried to help them settle the argument a few times, but after getting the tips of his hair singed he resigned to stay out of the way. It was completely foreign to El, and at first it had frightened her quite a bit. She didn't understand why two people who cared about each other so much could be so hateful toward each other? Well maybe she could see it in Lucas, but Mike was by far the sweetest person she had met. He was so patient and understand, or at least he always had been with her. She also understood being stubborn. Stubborn was the feeling she got when hopper wanted her to 'eat all her peas' and she refused, or when he said 'lights out at 9' and she stayed up until 9:30. But this was different.

"Dustin?" El asked at the boy who was currently chopping the burnt

ends of his hair off. He looked up inquisitively.

"Why... Fight?" He gestured to the boys who were screaming in each others faces, only kept apart by Nancy and a shield of ice she had conjured up.

"Oh that? Well Mike is really moody and it pisses Lucas off. And Lucas doesn't really have a filter so he usually hurts Mikes feelings. It is just a big cycle that we all try our best to stay out of. It will blow over before you know it."

"Enough of this! I'm out of here!" Mike threw his arms up, and his hands ignited. His bandages quickly turned into ash. He turned and stormed out the kitchen door, leaving a faint trail of smoke behind him. Lucas turned and stomped up the stairs, and the house fell silent.

"I should go talk to Lucas." Dustin said jumping off the kitchen counter. "Maybe I can get him to calm down and apologize."

"Good luck, i'm not sure he's the one who should be sorry." Nancy said, dusting ash off her jeans.

"Does it even matter at this point? Maybe I should go talk to Mike." Will said, speaking up for the first time. Fighting always made him quiet.

"I can!" El jumped up quickly.

"Are you sure, El? He is pretty fired up. Pun intended." Dustin snickered.

"Yes. Sure." El opened the door and walked out into the warm afternoon air. Dustin, Nancy, and Will shared a concerned glance before Dustin walked up the stairs behind his fuming friend.

"Hey, Will do you know if your brother is home?" Nancy asked the boy now that they were alone in the kitchen.

"He should be." Will said, looking confused.

"Okay great!" She grabbed her purse and practically ran out the door,

turning once over her shoulder to yell; "Don't let Mike burn down the forest!"

---

It was easy to tell where Mike had run off too by the trail of burnt footprints in the dry grass. El followed the trail into the forest and down a thin deer trail until she found him. Mike was sitting leaned up against a tree, throwing flaming pine cones into a nearby creek and cursing to himself. He was so caught up in his frustration that he didn't hear the frail girl approach.

"Mike?" El asked shyly.

"Oh El! Sorry I didn't hear you coming." Mike brushed his fiery palms against the dirt to smother them.

El walked towards the boy and sat down next to him. He radiated heat so intensely that it almost made El feel dizzy, but she scooted closer. Mike reddened and played with the scorched hem of his shirt.

"Mike. Your hurt." El touched the boys blistered and burned hands. He recoiled from the pain.

"Yeah a little, but it's okay. Nancy says I need to learn to control myself better but its just natural, You know?" He asked. Els knew exactly what it felt like to let her feelings get out of control. She had hurt people far worse than Mike ever had.

"I'm just so sick of Lucas thinking he can say whatever he wants all the time. He is such an asshole. I get that he is still adjusting to all of this and everything but it has been almost a year! It's about time he just got over himself." Mike crossed his arms and kicked the dirt.

"Adjusting?" El asked.

"Yeah adjusting. It means... getting used to something." Mike sighed and curled his knees up to his chest. "Lucas is still getting used to all of this. I just don't understand why he is having such a hard time with it."

"Mike?" El scooted even closer to her friend. "Family... should not fight."

"Yeah I guess you are right. Lucas, Dustin, and Will are great, like my brothers. And Nancy and I get along most of the time but it's just hard, especially when he acts like that." He sighed out a long deep breath that was mixed with smoke from somewhere deep inside of himself.

"Mike, family loves each other even when they are stupid." She said it very sternly, as if it were a fact. It was something Hopper had taught her, and to her it was a rule she lived by. Mike leaned back against the tree and looked over at her. He wanted to kick himself because more than anything else he knew what she meant, and she was right.

---

Lucas angrily paced back and forth the basement, hands in his pockets and teeth clenched. He was disregarding every word coming from his friends.

"Lucas!" Dustin finally yelled in a strange mixture of a lion's roar and his own voice. The boy snapped to attention, clearly annoyed.

"I'm not doing it! I'm not shaking his hand!" Lucas screamed.

"You know the rules. Whoever draws first blood has to shake first." Dustin waved his hands around in an exasperated plea.

"But I didn't draw first blood! He did!" Lucas pointed an accusing finger at Mike who until now had been very quiet.

"Did too!" Mike snapped.

"Lucas you always draw first blood. Everyone knows you always get mad and shoot little zapping light blasts at people." Dustin said sternly.

"Okay so maybe I did! But Mike started this entire thing! He told me to screw off, so when he turned around I zapped him!" Lucas crossed his arms.

"I only said that because you made fun of me for kissing El!" Mike got in his face. El glanced nervously between the two boys, suddenly overcome with guilt. Had she caused this situation? Her and Will subconsciously backed away from the blasting zone once again.

"That's because it's disgusting!" Lucas threw his hands behind himself, pointing his face directly in Mike's. They were only inches apart, both seething. Lucas had white blisters in the palms of his hands from fighting earlier and if he wasn't careful they would pop.

"Oh grow up!" Mike's hands began sputtering and smoking. Everyone took a collective breath and prepared for another round.

"Grow up!? GROW UP!?" Lucas conjured two whirring round disks of light in his hands like razor hockey pucks. "Did it ever occur to you that maybe I'm tired of growing up!? That I am tired of this bullshit because I don't want to grow up anymore!?" He lowered his hands and the disks faded back out of existence. Everyone gaped at the sight before them, Lucas was standing down, and to make matters worse, he was crying.

"I am so sick and tired of being like this! We used to be kids! We used to ride bikes and play D&D like it was some kind of fantasy, but now it's our real life! We thought this stuff only happened in comic books but we are living it and I hate it!" Lucas crumpled to the floor, whipping away his tears with hard deliberate swipes.

"My parents don't even talk to me anymore. My dad found me throwing a construct ball in the house and he grounded me. And now you have El and you can go off and be two weirdos in love, and Dustin has Will and I am left all by myself." He sniffled and held his face in his hands.

"Lucas it's not like that. We are all one party, together." Mike put a hand on his friend's back.

"Don't lie to me Wheeler, I'm not stupid." Lucas shoved Mike's hand away. Everyone stared at each other in amazed disbelief. In their eyes they really were all equal. No one knew what to say, until Will walked forward.

"Lucas? I know how you feel." Will knelt down in front of the crying boy. Lucas looked up at him, eyes red and puffy with a look of confusion. "I felt like an outcast too. My mom and Jonathan had these amazing gifts, and all my life I just watched them feeling like a loser. My mom could heal people, and had all of this knowledge

about the future and stuff, and my brother would always do tricks for me. He could turn out all the lights in the house with a single breath, or he could make it look like it was midnight in the middle of the day. I thought it was amazing, but I couldn't do anything. And then one day my dad was yelling at me, and I was crying and all of the sudden I just vanished. I had been waiting my entire life for something to make me special and all i could do was disappear. It felt like a cruel joke."

The room was silent, watching the small Byers boy recount his experience. Lucas watched him with astonishment.

"But then I met you guys, and at first the feeling only got worse. Like here are even more people who can do even cooler things that I can't, but the longer time went on the more you all made me feel like it was okay to just be myself. You guys accept me for who I am, so I don't need anyone else to think i'm cool. Not my dad, not anyone from school, just all of you because you are my friends." Will looked deeply into his friends eyes, he really was wise beyond his years.

Lucas nodded, it had been exactly what he needed to hear. He stood slowly, wiping the remaining tears from his face and walked towards the rest of the party, who where lingering near the basement steps. He extended a hand towards Mike and smiled shyly.

"Sorry I was being such an idiot."

"Its okay. I was too." Mike reached out and took the boys hand.

"Friends?"

"Friends."

---

Nancy took a deep breath, and steadied herself before walking onto the porch. She had been here before, probably a hundred times, but this time was different. She knew she had to apologize to Jonathan about what had happened between him and Steve. She exhaled sharply and knocked on the Byers front door. She heard some heavy footsteps coming from somewhere far away in the house, and in a few seconds the door swung open. Jonathan was wearing pajamas

even though it was almost noon. His black eye had gotten much darker since Nancy had last seen it, and he was holding a bag of frozen peas as a sort of makeshift ice pack.

"Nancy?" Jonathan gaped at her, she was the last person he expected to see standing on his front step on a Monday morning.

"Hey... I thought we should talk." Nancy tried to smile to show that she was being sincere. He stared back doubtfully, but moved out of the way to let her inside.

She walked into the living room and took a seat in an old armchair, clutching her purse tightly to her chest. Jonathan sat on the couch adjacent to her. He pressed the frozen peas to his face and winced. They stayed in the uncomfortable silence for a long time, neither knowing what to say, and neither wanting to make eye contact.

"Look Jonathan I just wanted to say that I'm really sorry." Nancy finally blurted, her words spilled out of her like a flood. "About yesterday, with Steve. I should have done something to stop him, to get him to calm down but I didn't and it got way out of hand and... I'm just sorry. He-"

"Nancy stop." Jonathan cut her off. "Just stop. Its fine. I don't blame you, alright? You aren't responsible for whatever your boyfriend gets upset over."

Nancy gawked at him. "Steve isnt my boyfriend."

"Oh no? So he just goes around beating people up for you because he isnt your boyfriend?"

"It's not like I asked him to! He just misunderstood what he saw and he wouldn't listen to me about it. I already told him off for all of this bullshit." She crossed her arms, biting back tears.

"Yeah misunderstood is an understatement." He realized that she was more upset than he had thought.

"He doesn't get it, you know?" She sniffled and turned towards him. "Like he has this secret that he keeps from everyone but it doesn't even bother him. It just makes him even more of an egotistical

asshole. He gets to have this amazing gift that makes him better at sports, and better at his job, and more popular and he doesn't even have any side effects!" She stood up, she was crying and screaming but not at anyone in particular.

"Side effects?" He asked.

"Yeah, you know like a reaction to your powers?" She sat down in the space next to Jonathan on the couch and pulled her hands into her lap, rubbing the cracked faintly purple skin on her fingers. "If i'm not careful I get frostbite. When I was little it was so bad that I had to go to the hospital and my parents thought I would have to lose a finger. It was July. That was the first time they realized that I was a different."

He understood exactly what she meant, he reached up and touched his bruised eye.

"Sometimes they make me go blind. My powers, I mean. It's gotten better, the longer I practice with them but sometimes if I get upset, i'll make it pitch black in the house and I won't be able to see anything, sometimes for hours but usually it comes back after a few minutes. It used to scare me a lot but now I just try to be really careful. I guess that's why I don't really talk to anyone. I like to stay out of the way and stick to the shadows."

"Thatss kind of cliché isn't it?" She chuckled.

"You are one to talk about cliché. The good girl who falls for the bad boy with the dark secret." He nudged her.

"It's not like that. He was the only other person in the world who I thought would understand, besides the boys. And I thought that I could change him I guess. He dated so many other girls but I thought that we had a connection. I guess I was just stupid." She sighed, leaning back against the couch.

"That's not stupid. I just wish i had known about you sooner. I never would have thought that miss perfect Nancy Wheeler was actually a freak like me." He smiled at her.



"I'm glad I know now." She smiled back. She had known Jonathan since they were little kids, and until they both started to develop their powers they had been pretty close. Now they were reunited with more in common than either of them could have imagined. For the first time in a long time, Nancy found herself feeling understood. Jonathan knew what it was like to be different, in a way that Steve never could, and maybe her feelings for Steve had just been her settling for something comfortable, something familiar.

Before either of them knew what was happening they were leaning in towards each other, only inches apart on the old faded couch.

"I'm glad I know too." His voice was a whisper. He looked in between her lips and her eyes and in a split second decision he inched forward, placing his lips on hers. She jumped at the sensation, but she leaned into his kiss, deepening it. It felt perfect, and safe and exactly like all of things that Kissing Steve had never been.

She pulled away a few moment later, flushed and smiling. But then she saw the bruise on his eye, and she felt confused. It hasn't even been a day since she ended things with Steve and she worried that she was just jumping into something else to fill the hole he had left in her chest.

"I'm sorry. I have to go." She stood up quickly, spilling the contents of her purse onto the floor and quickly scrambling to shovel them back inside.

"Nancy wait Im sorry I shouldn't have done that, dont leave." He tried to put a hand on her shoulder but she shrugged it off and continued out the front door, slamming it behind her.

Jonathan rubbed his temples, and cursed himself for making an idiot move on her like that. He stood up too, sighing and watching out the window as she sped off. He walked towards to the kitchen but stopped when he stepped on something on the floor. In her haste she had forgotten something on the floor.

It was a small Polaroid that Jonathan had taken many years ago when He and Nancy were in elementary school. She was flashing a huge silly grin, complete with missing teeth, and she was holding a

small red construction paper valentine that he had given her. He chuckled dryly at it, remembering that he had never given a valentine to a girl before and that she had kissed him on the cheek. Even in the photo her fingers were an icy blue color, and he remembered that being the day his mother and father had gotten into a fight so bad that Jonathan had blacked out his father vision just to make him calm down.

Maybe Steve knew what it meant to have powers, and maybe he was a part of their secret world, but he didn't understand even a fraction of the pain that came with it. Jonathan and Nancy were connected by a hell of a lot more than painful side effects, or bastard fathers, there was something special between them, even if she was afraid to realize it.

## 10. Chapter Ten (Part 1): Hunted

Hello Everyone! I want to thank you all for your reviews and words of encouragement. Unfortunately, however, this story may have gotten a bit bigger than I intended, so Im leaving it up to you guys to determine how long it gets. The next chapter can be the finale, or it can continue with the party meeting Max and other adventure happening. I am more than happy to continue writing because I love this AU and I can see you all do too, but let me know what you want to see happen!

Anyway, I hope you enjoy!

---

Joyce paced around her living room for nearly an hour and half waiting for Hopper to arrive. She had chain smoked almost an entire pack of camels since she woke up, and she had called him at least 20 times. She sent Will and Johnathan to Benny's Dinner, she didn't want to involve them.

Joyce's gifts were a mystery to everyone who knew about them, even herself most of the time. They were usually just feelings. Small snippets of the future that would come to her throughout the day, never anything terribly important. But the premonition she had had earlier this morning came through as clear as crystal. Something bad was coming for Eleven.

Or rather, someone.

Hopper finally showed up just after the boys left. He came inside, his usual gruff demeanor masking his obvious concern. Joyce poured him a cup of coffee and they sat down at the dining room table.

"So you gonna tell me what this is all about?" He asked lighting a cigarette.

She paused for a moment. She had spent so long worrying about what was going to come that she hadn't considered how to explain it.

"I had a vision this morning. It woke me up from my sleep. I have

never had that happen before." She started. "Something terrible is going to happen to that little girl, Hop." Tears threatened to build in her eyes. Her and El had grown very close in the few months they had known each other. Joyce had always secretly wanted a daughter, and El needed a mother figure, not just a big sister.

Hoppers entire body tensed. He knew that Joyce's invitation had to mean something serious was coming, but he never considered that it was going to be about Eleven. He had kept her safe for so long, they had been so careful and he had come to far to let any of that go now.

"Tell me everything."

---

Hopper drove full speed from Joyce's house to his own. He called Flo to let her know he wasn't going to make it in today. He was seething, he wanted to punch something. His grip was so tight on the steering wheel that it left hand shaped dents in the metal.

Joyce had filled him in on her premonition. Those sick bastards from the lab had been hunting El for months, and they were about to find her. They were going to find her and take her away from him because she broke his rules.

Not if he could help it.

He pulled into the driveway so fast that he left deep gouges in the grass. He opened his door and jumped out practically before the car stopped moving. He threw open the front door so forcefully that it fell off its hinges and landed flat on the living room floor. He stomped from one end of the house to the other looking for her, praying she hadn't left yet.

"Hopper what the hell?" Nancy ran downstairs looking mortified, clearly not assuming the cause for commotion would be him.

"Where the hell are they!?" He screamed. Nancy looked at him confused for a brief second, and then she understood. Her face wracked with guilt.

"They... They went to go meet up with Dustin and Lucas... Hop I'm

sor-" He cut her off by pushing past and out the now gaping front entrance. In an instant his car screeched to life again and he dove off towards town.

---

Mike and El biked towards their usual meeting place with the rest of their party, the corner of Elm and Cherry. They mused about how nice the weather was, warm but not too warm with a gentle breeze, and how excited they were to spend the day at the arcade. El wasn't very good at the games, but she would sometimes use her powers to make one malfunction so the boys could get their coins back.

They pulled up to find Dustin and Lucas already waiting. Together the party headed downtown, blissfully unaware that anything was wrong.

They decided to stop by the local supermarket to get snacks, as per Dustin's request. Mike bought her and El a soda to share, and Dustin bought just about the entire store. El searched up and down the colorful aisles for something to satisfy her sweet tooth, and finally decided on a pack of gummy bears that was just out of her reach on the top shelf. She looked around for moments, not wanting to bother her friends, and when the coast was clear she sent the bag down into her hands effortlessly. She smiled when her nose didn't bleed, it rarely did anymore, and she turned to walk towards her friends. She stopped when a firm hand grabbed her shoulder from behind.

A grip she recognized.

She froze with fear, her heart skipped a beat, and then another, and another until she felt like she must be dying. It seemed like an eternity until her body finally reacted. She turned slowly to see who was behind her, although she already knew. It was one of her handlers, one of the bad men who had beaten her, and locked her away, and kept her in her prison. His face was almost unreadable, but El could see the amusement in his eyes. She had been found.

Part of her wanted to throw him against the wall, but she knew better. If he was here that meant he was following her, waiting for her to use her powers so he could be sure. She knew it meant he wasn't alone, and that if she tried anything he would most likely kill

her, or worse. Kill her friends. She contemplated what to do, eyes searching, heart racing, while the man's grip tightened on her arm.

"You're coming with me." He said so sternly it made her gut twist.

"No." If she was going, it wouldn't be without a fight. In a flash she sent the man flying backwards onto the cold linoleum floor. She knocked the wind out of him but he quickly scrambled back up. Another handler came out from behind the shelf, trapping her on the aisle. She pushed the second man against the shelf, making its contents spill all over the floor. She darted past him and spotted her friends who were laughing with each other by the shop entrance.

"Mike!" She screamed in desperation. He turned towards her, and everyone in the store looked on in surprise. She continued running full speed ahead out of the entrance doors, her friends on her heels, and her pursuers not far behind.

They ran to their bikes and hopped on, she hugged Mike close to her as he peddled.

"What the hell is happening, who are those guys chasing you?" Lucas yelled.

El gasped for breath, trying to collect herself. "Bad men."

The boys shared knowing glances and peddled on towards Mirkwood. They heard tires screeching behind them, and saw several large 'Department of Energy' vans speeding towards them.

"Shit shit shit shit shit shit" Dustin began stuttering, his bag of snacks bouncing around as they turned onto a street, and then another, and another in a desperate attempt to confuse the men chasing them.

They took a shortcut through someone's unfenced lawn and pulled onto the street, heading straight towards an oncoming van. El gripped Mike tighter and lowered her gaze. In an instant the van spun around and wrapped around a large tree just off the sidewalk. The boys cheered. Lucas turned around and sent a red blade from his finger tips towards the top of the tree. The trunk severed in half like butter, and came careening down on top of the already totaled van.

No one inside could have survived the impact.

They peddled on, dodging other cars and pedestrians. Another van gained speed behind them, quickly closing in on the teens. Mike turned his head and focused intensely for just a moment. Suddenly the vehicle erupted in flames. The children could hear screaming coming from behind them as they cycled away. They turn down another street when it exploded, sending flaming debris in all directions.

Police sirens in the distance sent another wave of adrenaline through the teens. They turned in the direction of Hops house and peddled even faster when they saw Hopper himself speeding towards them. He slammed on his breaks, stopping just short of hitting them and yelled out his window.

"Get in!"

They threw their bikes into the back of his truck and piled inside in a sweaty, panting heap. No one said a word as hop drove recklessly back towards home, sirens turned off. He pulled up to the house and drove around back, hiding his car from sight. The group spilled out of his car and walked around to the front of the house. Nancy and Jonathan were hard at work putting the door back on hinges, and Joyce was smoking a cigarette nervously, leaning on the railing.

Hopper pushed past everyone inside, storming into the living room and falling into his chair. Joyce pulled El in for a hug, softly stroking the girls back. They followed Hopper inside tentatively. He had a bad temper on any given day, but today was anything but normal.

"Joyce you didn't need to come here. You are just putting yourself and your kids at risk." He pinched the bridge of his nose. His tone was gravely serious.

"These kids risked their safety for us, so we are going to do the same for them." She crossed her arms and sat across from him on the couch. He sighed, leaning back, he knew he couldn't change her mind and he probably needed their help anyway.

The party stayed near the door. El hid behind Mike, trying hard not

to cry.

"Eleven," Hopper rarely used her full name. He didn't like reducing her to a number but he needed her to know he was serious. "Come here. Now."

She walked towards him slowly. She grabbed Mike's hand absentmindedly for support and made her way to the couch next to Joyce. Mike sat on the arm of the couch, giving her some space, but not much.

"I have been fair to you. I gave you easy rules to follow, and you didn't follow them, and now we are all screwed." His voice was the most angry El had ever heard. Usually he just yelled, and that was scary enough. But his tone now was so intensely enraged that she wished more than anything he was screaming.

"I-" She started, tears welling in her eyes.

"I don't want to hear it," He interrupted, voice rising. "I don't want to hear a damn word out of you. You are gonna sit and for once you are going to listen! Do you think I made up those rules to be mean? Do you think I just like keeping you inside all the damn time for fun?"

"I never leave... Its summer." She cried.

"I said I didn't want to hear it! I made those rules to keep you safe! To keep all of us safe! My job is to protect you, Eleven! But I can't do that if you disobey me like some kind of brat!" He stood up, towering over the weeping girl.

Mike wanted to say something but deep down he knew Hopper was right. They did disobey and look at what happened. The rest of the kids huddled together as far from view as they could be. It was painful to watch but no one wanted the anger to be turned towards them.

"Jim calm down." Joyce stood too. She raised a hand towards Hop in an attempt to empathically heal him. Anger wasn't going to help anyone feel better, and it certainly wasn't going to save El.

"Don't get in my head Joyce!" He bellowed.



"Screaming isn't going to fix this! You need to calm down and think about this clearly!" She was shouting now too, matching his tone, and pointing an accusing finger in his direction.

"Don't you worry about how *clearly* I am thinking! I have understood everything!" He pushed past Joyce, towering over El again. He opened his mouth to continue his beratement, but El interrupted.

"I'm sorry." Her voice was so low and so shaken it was almost inaudible. Hopper stopped, it took him a few seconds to register what she had said.

"I broke the rules. I'm sorry." She repeated. Jim almost couldn't believe what he was hearing. El was usually so headstrong and argumentative, but she knew the severity of what she did and she was prepared to take the consequences. Suddenly every bit of anger in his body turned into sympathy. She had made a mistake because she was a kid. A kid who had been kept prisoner her entire life and just wanted freedom. She made a stupid mistake because that is what kids do. It struck him for the first time that more than anything else, he was so upset because he loved her. She was his little girl, and he would do anything to keep her safe.

"I was stupid."

He stepped forward and scooped the girl into a desperate hug. A hug so strong it made it hard to breathe, but one they both needed. She cried in his arms, not for the first time, not even for the 20th time, but for what felt like it could be the last.

"No, you're not stupid." He whispered, resting his chin on her curly head. "You're just a kid, and I should have done more to keep this from happening then just lock you up in here." She pulled away to look at him, he had tears in his eyes too.

"I guess I was stupid too." He smiled at her, relief flooding through him that at least she was safe for right now. She smiled back and pulled him back into the hug.

A hush fell over the room. Joyce rubbed El's back, and smiled at her own children across the room. The party was still standing by the

door, but one by one they made their way to the couch and joined in the hug.

"Uh guys, I hate to ruin this touching moment and everything but I think we need to figure out what to do about those crazy government spies." Dustin finally said after the group had broken apart. Hopper sighed and paced toward the window to look outside.

"We need to come up with a plan." Nancy added.

"How hard can it be to take down a few evil scientists?" Lucas said, smiling trying to lighten the mood.

"Yeah if El escaped from them before, she can fight them off, and plus we have a secret weapon." Mike jumped up from his spot on the couch. Everyone looked at him, waiting for him to continue.

"They don't know we all have powers."

## 11. Chapter Ten (part 2): Ashes to Ashes

Hello everyone! Thank you all for your comments of encouragement. I am going to continue this story for a while longer. We will get to meet Max, and have some more fun bonding! Let me know what you guys would like to see from this AU because your ideas really inspire me!

Hope you enjoy!

---

The rest of the evening was a blur of movement, hopper barking orders, and everyone preparing for the battle of their lives.

El and Hopper collected sheets of scrap metal and wood to create a makeshift barricade in front of the house. They held all of the sheets in place while Steve hammered in the pins in, in a flurry of movement. Mike found a can of gasoline in the barn and got to work pouring it out over the dirt driveway.

Dustin and Lucas dug through old boxes in the attic and found an assortment of weapons, binoculars, and one very 'badass' camouflage bandana that Lucas quickly adorned. They carried the boxes down to the porch just behind the barricade. Hopper loaded his shotgun.

Joyce and Will went down into the basement so she could try to channel the future. She hoped it would help them stay one step ahead but it was difficult. All of the chaos in the house made it hard to get through clearly. She shifted her focus instead on casting a calming aura throughout the house to try to get everyone in a more concentrated headspace.

Jonathan and Nancy paced around the house trying their best to help anyway they could. Suddenly Nancy got an idea, and together they ran out to the barn and started hooking hundreds of feet of hose together and pulled them across the field.

It was awkward tense work; Every time their hands touched, or they rubbed arms against each other they would mumble some sort of apology and jump apart. Finally after the hundredth 'sorry', Nancy

snapped.

"Why are you acting so weird!?" She turned to him accusingly.

"I think im allowed to act a little... skittish given the circumstances." He dropped his gaze to the floor trying to smile through his embarrassment.

'What circumstances? You mean because of what happened the other day at your house? It didn't mean anything, Johnathan! I was just..."

"I mean because an entire secret government agency is on their way to kill all of us." He interrupted. Nancy stopped dead in her tracks, completely floored. "And if it really didn't mean anything, then you wouldn't be worrying more about that then everything else that's going on." He threw the remaining coil of hoses over his shoulder and pushed past her, leaving her alone in the barn.

She kicked herself. 'It really didn't mean anything!' she wanted to yell at him, but he was gone and she stayed silent. But it hadn't, it couldn't, she liked Steve! Didn't she? She shook off her thoughts and followed him outside. He was right, this really was more important.

After the front porch was fully protected by the barricade, everything stilled. Now it was just a waiting game. Joyce knew they were coming but she didn't know when. If Hoppers assumptions were correct, it would probably sometime late in the night, under the cover of darkness.

Hopper took watch outside with Joyce, together they chain smoked in silence, eyes watching vigilantly. Joyces calming aura had helped but her own nerves were making is difficult to keep strong. Jonathan hammered long rusty screws into an old bat while Nancy set their plan in motion, taking guard from the roof. Jonathan blocked them from view by a wall of shadowy fog, blending in with the night sky. Nancy gripped the hose tight in her hands, waiting for the perfect moment to strike.

The boys and El hunkered down in the basement, waiting for the signal. Will, Dustin, and Lucas mumbled nervously amongst themselves around the D&D table, going over the plan again and

again. El and Mike sat on the stairs, Mike clutched his supercom tightly in one hand, and El's hand in the other. In the intensity of the moment, Mike's fingers sputtered and smoked, he bounced his knee nervously. El was silent, staring deeply up the stairs, ready at any second to run and face everything she feared most.

"El?" Mike broke the silence. She turned to him and raised an eyebrow but she stayed quiet.

"It's going to be okay. We aren't going to let them take you." He squeezed her hand. "I won't let them hurt you." He looked into her eyes deeply. Her face was blank, as usual, but Mike could see the terror lurking somewhere deep inside of her.

"won't let them hurt you either." For the brief moment it was like nothing else mattered. They leaned in together and shared a brief kiss, before the supercom crackled to life.

"It's time."

Nancy heard it before she saw it. The faint rumbling of several cars driving quickly towards them. Her and Jonathan shared a glance and she tensed her grip on the hose, she had to be sure. Then she saw the headlights flickering through the trees

The house sprang into action. Hopper flipped off the safety on his gun, Steve cl

at the forest's edge. One pair, and then another, and another until she lost count. One by one they turned down the private dirt road and turned off their beams. She jolted upright, squeezed the walkie-talkies button and alerted the others.

They were here.

atched the bat Jonathan had made, spinning it around nervously in his hands. Joyce held an old rusty ax, pulling it to her chest more like a safety blanket than a weapon.

The party stormed up the stairs, taking their places behind the barricade. Lucas conjured a whirring ball of red light and placed it in his faithful wrist rocket, pulling the cord back tightly and taking aim.

Dustin turned into a stealthy owl and soared off into the night sky, towards the approaching onslaught.

Mike ignited his hands, his anxiety making the flames somewhat difficult to manage. El took her place next to him and focused, waiting for the vans to get close enough that she could do some damage.

"You ready, El?" Mike asked. She nodded and turned to Will. His abilities were not destructive, but his part of the plan was just as important as anyone's. He reached out and grabbed El's hand, and in a matter of seconds both kids disappeared.

Dustin soared expertly through the breeze, a sense of determination pushing him to complete his part of the plan. It didn't take long for him to come face to face with the creeping vans. He swooped higher, trying to avoid being seen and began counting off the approaching vehicles in haunting screeches.

One... Two... Three... Four... He started to panic, in the darkness it didn't look like there was an end in sight. Five... Six... Seven... Eight. He delivered the final warning and took position above the final speeding van.

He flew higher into the air, straight up, as high as his wings could take him. He flipped around, beak pointed, wings tucked tightly against himself like a torpedo, and he sped back down to earth, back down the vans below. He waited until just the right second and in the blink of an eye he turned into a massive elephant, landing just on top of the furthest vehicle, crushing it completely under his weight.

One down, seven to go.

Nancy heard the alarm from across the field and jolted into position. She compressed the hoses and a heavy stream of water began flooding over the roof top. Jonathan grabbed the hose from her, he held it up and outward over the area sending a arching spray of water out over the roof. Nancy took in a deep breath and then released a wave of energy into the water, breaking it apart into thousands of dagger-like ice cycles. They splayed out across the field, where the vans were now screeching to a halt, and dozens of armored

men were pouring into the yard. Several icy shards hit the unsuspected heads of the first wave of men, others stuck into the ground, tripping the second wave. Nancy couldn't believe her plan was actually working.

Retaliation shots rang out across the yard, colliding with the barricade as the men continued toward the house. Hopper and Lucas shifted between shooting out the portholes, and ducking behind the metal walls.

"Steve!" Hopper hollered. "Go!"

"On it!" In a flash Steve sped toward the onslaught, bat at the ready. He zoomed around at least a dozen government officials, knocking them backwards across the field. His astounding speed sent them flying backwards from the sheer momentum. To the attackers he was a shapeless mass of blurred color, and shifting atoms, until one lucky gunman hit him in the leg. The teen wailed in pain, careening to the ground.

"Steve!" Nancy cried from her post on the roof. She dropped her defenses, panic rising in her chest as she moved toward the ladder at the roof edge.

"No Nancy, You are better help here. I'll go block him." Before she could protest Jonathan was already climbing down the ladder, and running toward the fallen boy. Tears streamed down her face as she watched Jonathan pull the boy up from the ground, and out of the field of vision, casting a blanket of darkness over them. She continued her hailstorm.

A nearly deafening trumpet rang out as Dustin stampeded back towards the house, crushing several unlucky individuals under his feet. The rumbling stomped as he shifted back into a bird. He flew towards the porch, changed back into himself and landed in a clumsy heap.

"Shit, shit, son of a bitch!" He was holding his arm and screaming.

"Dustin what happened!?" Joyce dropped to her knees next to the boy, releasing the ax from her white knuckle grip.

"Ow ow OW GOD DAMN IT!" Dustin wailing, pulling his hand away from his arm and saw that it was covered in thick maroon blood.

"Take him inside, Joyce!" Hopper yelled while he took a brief pause to reload his gun. "Now!" She complied and scooped the boy up, taking him into the house.

One of the vans screeched as it propelled itself forward, full speed to the house. Mike steadied his breathing and jumped in front of the barricade, this was the moment he had been waiting for. He screamed, releasing a massive ball of scorching flames directly at the road in front of them. The gas line he had poured only a few hours before immediately inflamed. The barreling van drove directly over the fire and ignited, slamming on its brakes and skidding from side to side before it slid dangerously close to the porch.

El, hand still intertwined in Wills and still hidden from sight, locked eyes on the flaming vehicle and scent a blast of pulsing energy directly at it. The van flipped over, rolling full speed backwards like it had been hit with a ten ton wrecking ball.

"Lucas cover me, i'm out of ammo!" The chief hollered.

"On it!" Lucas went into double time, manifesting and flinging sharp frisbee like blades out across the invasion. He took out several assailants down until there were only a few remaining. The palms of his hands and pads of his fingers were hot and blistered, and despite his determination he collapsed to the porch floor, panting and covered in sweat.

Mike took his place at the porthole, sending out a wave of fire like a massive blow torch. He gasped at the pain it caused him but he sent out another, and another, making the yard look like a molten ocean. Nancy fell to her knees on the roof, she was shaking like a leaf from exhaustion, and with her brothers handywork below, her icy attack was worthless.

Somewhere in the chaos, Hopper had jumped off the porch, and bent a piece of metal from the barricade out of his way as if it were nothing but tinfoil. He ran toward the remaining men and settled on relying on only his hand-to-hand combat to take out those who



remained; Luckily he was pretty confident in his abilities.

He swung a jab at the man in front of him and sent him to the ground. He reached for the man's military grade weapon, and crumpled it like paper. He ran toward the only remaining van that was not yet emptied of its occupants, he assumed that whoever was inside must be the brains of this pathetic assault. He spit into his hands, preparing to send the sorry sons-of-bitches soaring through the air like a flying saucer when the van's doors slid open, and the occupants made their entrance onto the battlefield.

They looked like spacemen, wearing strangely alien suits, and holding highly advanced, experimental weapons. It was only six men, only six remaining from the entire invasion, but everyone could tell that they wouldn't be as easy to take out.

Mike paused, stepping away from the porthole to catch his breath. His hands positively smoldering. El watched through the window, now that it was clear, and felt her heart catch in her throat. Leading the final pack was the person she feared most.

It was Papa.

She slowly let go of Wills hand, fading back into reality and taking form in the hole Hopper had made during his exit. She thought that seeing him again would send her reeling in fear, but instead it fueled her with something different. Hatred.

He was responsible for every horrible and depraved thing that had ever happened to her. He single handedly stole her childhood, her chance at being normal, and her life. She would never get those years back, she would always be haunted by her past no matter how wonderful her future had become. She felt the rage bubble up inside of her like a volcano waiting to explode.

She stepped forward, replaying in her mind every second of her life that he had ruined. Every painful experiment, every invasive examination, every needle, every night locked in the darkness, every slap, and hit, and kick. It was like time stood still as she made her way towards him. He saw her now too, and pulled his spaceage helmet off, discarding it on the ground. He was confident in his

manipulation of her, he was sure she wouldn't hurt him.

She extended a shaking hand at him, and one by one his comrades fell to the ground, their eyes bleeding as she compressed their skulls from the inside out. She stepped closer still, ignoring the panic in her chest, ignoring Hopper screaming at her to stop. Ignoring Mike as he ran to try to snap her out of her dedication. She ignored all of it, and in another small step she was directly at his feet, looking up into his eyes filled with malicious joy. He kneaded slowly, to look at her directly.

"Eleven." He reached a hand towards her, and rested it on her soft tear stained cheek. She didn't know he had been crying, and it didn't matter. She could see how sickeningly proud of her he was, for using her powers in such a display of violence and power.

She was stronger than she had been before, and although it would make her harder to control, he relished in the infinite possibilities her talents would allow her to achieve. His perfect weapon, his brilliant creation, his trophy for a lifetime of dedication to science. Not only that, but she had found others. Others with abilities so unique and magnificent, like a treasure trove of untapped power. He had thought Eleven was a miracle, only a few coming before, and none as strong, but she had brought them to him, like an offering. He stroked her cheek again, how proud he was.

"Papa?" Her voice revealed the fear inside of her. Underneath everything she was still just a scared little girl, and her Papa had trained her to always obey, always follow.

"Eleven I am going to take you home, where you belong." He cupped her face and she cried harder, her lip quivering. It took every ounce of strength she had not to comply.

"No." Her voice was like a whisper. He grabbed onto her shoulder, somewhat more forcefully, but she hardened.

"No." She tried to shake off his grip but he locked his fingers around her arm.

"NO!" Her voice was like a wall, sending him flying backwards into

the van he had spilled out of. She stepped forward, sending another blast of telekinetic energy at him, causing him to gasp.

All eyes were on her as she lifted him up from the ground, into the night air. Nancy from the rooftop, Jonathan and Steve from the forest edge, no longer cloaked in a shadow, Joyce and Dustin from the doorway, Lucas and Will from the porch floor, Hopper from just a few paces away, and Mike from directly behind her. He wanted desperately to reach out to her console her, but he knew that she needed to do this. She needed to take out all of her anger, pain, sorrow, and grief at the man who caused it.

El was screaming, and wailing, but she couldn't hear it. All she could hear were the lies her Papa had told her over and over again, all of the hurtful terrible things he had said. She compressed him against some invisible force and squeezed his lungs. He sputtered and struggled against her grasp, choking out her name for the last time before his eyes rolled back into his head and he stopped moving all together.

She screamed again, so forcefully it felt like her vocal chords might rip in half. The windows of the vans shattered, spraying glass all around. She compressed him harder and harder, unrelenting until he started to break apart from the pressure. Still elevated into the sky, he broke off into fragmented dust, almost impossibly splintering off and flowing freely in the night air. He looked exactly like the all too familiar smoke that haunted her in the void whenever she reached out to touch whoever she was sent to find, and just like that, he was gone. Leaving her alone in the blackness.

She collapsed onto the ground, falling backwards in Mike's arms. She had dark streams of blood running from both sides of her nose, and ears, and even welling in the corners of her eyes. She screamed and sobbed and let the smoke carry away all of her pain. It hurt, it hurt worse than she ever would have imagined to finally rid the world of the man who created her, but she knew it had to be done. And deep down, unfathomably deep inside of her gut she could feel that she was healing, and that after everything calmed down she just might feel whole.

Hopper ran to her, and took her from Mike's arms into his own,

rocking her back and forth, and hushing her softly.

"Hey, kid. Shh Shh. Its okay." He held her so tightly it felt like she might break, but he wouldn't let go, not for even a second. "You did it, El. Its over. You did it."

Mike scooted forward and rubbed her back. Slowly, from all sides of the yard the rest of the party made their way to the crying girl, and Hopper- her new father. Despite injuries, and exhaustion, and the carnage around them, they joined in a group hug that not a single one of them wanted to break away from. Some cried, others almost laughed in relief, but mostly they basked in the peace of the moment, and in the realization that things were going to be okay.

El was finally free.

## 12. Chapter Eleven: The Aftermath

After the dust settled, Hopper carried El up the stairs and placed her in bed. Her body was limp from the energy she exerted and from sobbing for so long. He changed her out of her shirt that was now covered in dirt, and blood, only some of which was hers. He covered her in her blanket and left to get a damp washcloth to clean off her face.

When he came back, to his surprise, she was sitting up, eyes filled with tears again.

"Hopper?" Her voice was hoarse and scratchy.

He moved to sit next to her on the bed. "Yeah, kid?"

"I'm sorry I broke your rules." She said shamefully.

He couldn't believe what he was hearing. After everything, after the battle, after defeating the man who imprisoned her, after watching so many of her friends get injured, she was still guilty? The fight they had earlier that evening felt like a million years ago. He couldn't help but chuckle.

"It's okay, El. I forgive you." He reached up and held her face in his hand. "That is all in the past now. You took care of the bad men once and for all."

"But you got hurt." She pointed to the cuts on his arms. He didn't even remember where they had come from.

"Don't you worry about me, kid. I would let myself get banged up a hundred times before I ever let those bastard come near you, do you understand me?"

She considered his words for a moment before she spoke. "Why?" Her eyes were sullen, and steadfast and he could tell that this was a deeply packed question.

It was his turn to think over his reason. El had come into his life only a few months before but already she was an integral part of his life.

After he had lost his own daughter, a piece of himself had never fully recovered, and he didn't think it ever could. He didn't know it at the time, but when he started looking after Mike and Nancy, he had been trying to fill that empty space in his heart. He had watched them grow, and taught them life lessons, and cared for them, but it was different. They had parents, no matter how absent they may be.

El had no one, and she didn't know even the smallest parts of being in a family, or being loved. Every lesson he taught her, every day they spent together, every new thing she learned shaped her into the person in front of him. She was his pride and joy, and in some strange way he found himself feeling like a real father again.

"Because I love you." He grabbed her tiny hands in his and looked deeply into her. "I love you more than anything else and I won't ever let you go."

Tears flooded from her eyes again and she threw herself into his arms in a long embrace.

"I love you too."

---

Jonathan and Nancy helped carry Steve inside and laid him out on the living room floor.

Joyce spread her hands out over them and began chanting quietly to herself. It was some kind of prayer, or mantra, and after a few repetitions the space between her hands began swirling around with a light purple smoke. The smoke grew and grew and filled the room above the boy. Little lavender sparks flickered in the air and Joyce pushed the smoke down, sending it into Steve's injured leg.

He felt his skin tingle and heat up from the inside out. His leg twitches and jerked around with the sensation, It almost tickled. Then, all at once, the stinging throbbing pain from his injury vanished, and the smoke disappeared.

Joyce staggered and fell backwards onto the couch, her eyes almost immediately turned bloodshot and her ring in dark purple.

"That is incredible." Steve breathed, he was feeling his leg and was stunned to find he was not long in any pain. The only sign anything had happened was a faint red scar.

"It really comes in handy, raising two boys." She smiled weakly.

Hopper came down the stairs and was immediately bombarded by a barrage of questions from the boys.

"Is she okay?"

"What do we do now?"

"IS EL OKAY?"

"Did we do it? Did we defeat the lab?"

"Woah woah woah! One at a time please for christs sake!" He pinched the bridge of his nose and pushed past them into the living room, taking a seat across from Joyce in his favorite armchair. He pulls a cigarette from his coat pocket and extends it out for Mike to light.

Mike walked forward and stood, arms crossed, in front of hopper. "Is she okay?" He demanded.

Hopper took a long drag from his cigarette and nodded. "She's fine, just tired. She needs to rest. That goes for all of you." He looked over all of the people in the room. "You can all stay here tonight if you want."

"That's probably the best idea. I would feel weird going home after all of that." Joyce said from across the room.

Everyone took a moment of silence. It hadn't even been an hour since they had taken down the entirety of Hawkins Lab, but it already felt like a distant memory. Everyone became suddenly aware they they were covered in blood, dirt, and bruises.

"What do we do about the bodies." Nancy whispered, breaking the silence.

"I have some connections with the military. Hawkins Lab may have

been doing a lot of the dirty work, but here is now way they were the only facility doing research like this. The government isn't going to want a story like this getting out, so i'm sure they will take care of all of it." Hopper stood and walked into the kitchen, dialing some number he had committed to memory long ago.

The boys filled upstairs into the bathroom and crowded around the sink, shoving each other in an attempt to wash the grime from their faces.

Downstairs Nancy and Steve stood silently in the dining room, neither wanting to speak or look at the other.

"Look, Steve I'm sorry about our fight at the party. It was stupid." Nancy finally blurted.

"Yeah it was stupid, but you weren't lying." He said, still looking at the floor.

"I was drunk, I didn't even know what I was saying." She moved towards him.

"Maybe, maybe not. But I know you well enough by now to know that you never say something you don't mean." He finally met her gaze.

She opened her mouth to say more, but closed it again. She was speechless, because he was right.

"Nancy dont worry about it, okay? I was a shitty boyfriend. I get that." He reached over and put a hand on her shoulder. "And i'm sorry i wasn't there for you all the time."

"I thought that because we shared this double life, that it meant we would have a deeper connection but..." She trailed off her sentence and stared at the floor, she didn't want to hurt him.

"But we have less in common than you and Jonathan." He finished her thought for her.

"No no it's not like that, he and I just-"



"Nancy stop. I might be an idiot, but even I can see that you guys have something. You should just cut the bullshit and tell him already." He smiled at her with that charming smirk, just like always and she pulled him into a hug.

"You aren't a complete idiot, Steve Harrington." She whispered into his shoulder.

---

Mike layed out blankets and sleeping bags across the basement floor while the other boys took turns showering and changing up stairs. He couldn't help but feel strange. It just seemed so weird to do normal things like get dressed and have a sleep over after everything he had just gone through. He glanced across the basement at Els blanket fort and sighed.

He knew she was probably asleep, and that Hopper would kick his ass if he knew Mike had gone to talk to her, but he needed to know for himself that she was okay.

He crept up the basement steps, sneaking past Hop, who was still on the phone, and rounded the corner to go up to the second story. Els bed room was the first at the top of the stairs. He quietly opened the door and slinked inside.

She was sleeping soundly, and snoring just a little bit each time she inhaled. Hopper had washed her face, but her hair was still matted with sweat and dirt in places, and her arms were speckled blood and ash. But despite it all, Mike still found himself blushing, and his heart racing at the sight of her.

He crossed the room and knelt by the bed, only inches away from her face. He reached out and pushed a loose curl back into place behind her ear. She stirred slightly but resumed her peaceful snoring a moment later.

"El?" He asked softly, to make sure she was really asleep. When she didn't respond he continued.

"I just wanted to say that i'm really happy you are okay. I don't know what i would do if anything happened to you because well... I really

like you and I think i want to be with you forever. I know that probably sounds crazy but I mean it. I want all of us, Dustin, Lucas and Will included, to be friends forever. You just make me feel really happy, and being with you makes me feel like... Like i'm home i guess. I don't know if that makes sense but its how I feel." He stared at her for a long time, taking in the sight of her. He felt tears falling from his eyes and turning to steam when they rolled over his blushing cheeks.

"I wish I could say all of this to you when you are awake, but its hard. You make me all tongue-tied and the guys are always around so I never get the chance... Maybe i will try to tell you tomorrow... Okay I better go to bed. Goodnight El." Mike leaned forward and kissed her forehead.

He got up slowly and turned to leave, being careful not to make a sound.

"Mike?" A voice from behind him said sleepily. He whipped around to see her eyes open and a flushed smile on her face.

"It makes sense. I want to be with you forever. You make me happy too." She beamed up at him and he just stared wide eyed and mouth opened in return.

"Goodnight, Mike." She rolled over to face the wall.

Mike felt his face get hot all over again and he grinned to himself. He opened the door and walked downstairs feeling like the luckiest guy on earth.

"What are you so smiley about Wheeler?" Lucas asked tossing a pillow at the dopey-faced boy.

"Mikeys in loooooove!" Dustin clasped his hands together melodramatically and snickered.

"Am not!" Mike said, flopping into his sleeping bag and rolling away from eye sight.

"Yeah sure. So when's the wedding?" Lucas asked sarcastically, sending Dustin into another fit of laughter.

"Come on guys, leave him alone." Will said after he finished laughing himself.

The boys all got settled into their beds and in no time the basement was filled with the sounds of snoring, and sleep. Aside from Mike who was grinning at himself under his blanket.

"I want to be with you forever." You make me happy too." He replayed the words in his head over and over until he too finally gave into sleep.

---

After a long tense conversation, Hopper finally hung up the phone and walked back into the living room. Jonathan and Nancy were talking quietly amongst themselves while an obviously uncomfortable Steve lingered in the doorway. Joyce, who had been chain smoking all evening was now alert, waiting for Hopper to fill her in.

"Well?" She demanded. The remaining teens turned their attention to Hopper who took his seat across from Joyce.

"I have good new and I have bad news." He sighed, leaning back into his chair.

"Start with the good news." Steve said crossing the room to take a seat next to Joyce.

"The good news is that whatever people are in charge of funding Hawkins lab are willing to work with us. They don't want any of this getting out to the press and as of right now we are the only people left who know anything." Hopper rubbed his temples, clearly distressed by whatever arrangement he had made.

"What does that mean?" Joyce asked.

"It means they aren't going to send more people here to kill us, and it means they aren't going to take El away." He breathed a long sigh of relief.

"Well that's great! Isn't it?" Nancy said standing up.

"It's good because it means we aren't in any immediate danger..." He

trailed off.

"But?" Jonathan pressed.

"But they had no clue there were more people out of their surveillance that had abilities."

"So... So what?" Joyce asked somewhat panicked. Everyone could tell there was more lurking behind Hoppers words but he was hesitant to continue.

"So the bad news is, they have a lot of questions. They want to know how this happened, and why it happened. They aren't going to just forget all of this happened and let us go on with our lives, they want answers." His voice was tense, and so was his grip on the arm of the chair.

"They are going to turn all of us into lab rats?" Steve stood up again, raising his voice in anger.

"I don't know. But they would be stupid to try anything like that." Hopper sighed.

"But what? They want to interrogate us?" Joyce stood up. "To... to run experiments on us?" She gestured wildly with her arms.

"I don't know! But I do know that it is in everyone's best interests to try to cooperate. Them included!" Hopper raised his voice enough to prove he was serious. Joyce crossed her arms in defiance. There was a beat of silence while everyone processed the situation. Hopper stood up with a groan and looked around the room before speaking again.

"And besides, I think we would all like to understand a little more about it ourselves. I know I do."

## 13. Chapter Twelve: The Storm

**This chapter is for everyone who has been wanting to see Max come into the picture! She is always such a challenging character to write for, but this chapter was really fun!**

**Hope you enjoy!**

---

It was a warm and peaceful August day. The wind danced through the trees, and stirred up the sweet smell of wild flowers, and fresh cut grass. Everything is still and calm.

El gingerly picked the yellow petals from a dandelion, her head resting in Mikes lap. He was telling her about something he learned from a Carl Sagan book he was reading, but El found it hard to focus. She was caught up in the beauty, and simplicity of the moment. She closed her eyes and took a deep breath, filling her lungs with the earthy smell of summer.

All felt right in the world. She lazily opened her eyes to look at the boy she cared for more than anything else, but found he was no longer above her. The world had turned black.

She sat up, and scanned her surroundings. She found herself in the all too familiar darkness of the void. Cold shallow water underneath her, and overwhelming nothingness push down on her from all sides.

"Mike!?" She called out in desperation. Her voice echoed through the gloom but she heard no response. Suddenly the air turned bitter and cold, and something flickered in the distance. The haunting sound of thunder rumbled towards the girl, like a stampede of angry elephants. El walked towards to growing visage in front of her, towards to roaring sound.

Stepping closer, El saw what looked like a girl sitting on a lonely mattress, surrounded by blackened rain clouds. El screamed as a hot bolt of silver light crashed into the ground just in front of her. Her voice was lost in the roaring thunder. Another electric strike sent the girl flying backwards. She landed hard on her back and desperately

tried to catch her breath. She raised her arms in defense but she wavered. How do you fight a storm? She scrambled up onto her feet. The clouds looked like some kind of horrible monster, crawling slowly towards her with the soul purpose of washing her away. El felt so small in the presence of power so intense, that it could kill her not even know it.

El rushed towards the girl on the bed, She was trembling, and sobbing quietly; her hair like red fire against the blue clouds. El could hear muffled screaming and something breaking, the girl flinched. Another bolt of lightning struck and El dropped to her knees. She reached out to put a hand on the girls shoulder, and just like always, the scene began to vanish into smoke. El could still hear thunder rolling on even when she was alone again in the void. There was a voice lost in the rumbling aswell; a small voice rapidly growing closer.

"Eleven!?"

El shot up in bed gasping, eyes wide and panicked. Mike was kneeling next to her bed, face creased with concern.

"You were having a nightmare. I could hear you crying from my room." Mike sat up on the bed next to her. She turned to him, still panting and reached out for him like a scared child. Mike wrapped her in a hug and gently smoothed her hair. They stayed like that for a long time before El had the composure to speak.

"I saw a girl." She whispered hoarsely. "And a storm."

"Did she try to hurt you?"

"No. The storm did. It was..." She considered her words for a moment. "Alive."

"You are safe now, El. It was just a bad dream." He hugged her tighter.

"Stay with me?" She asked, her voice muffled in Mikes hair.

"I really wish I could, but Hop would kill us if he found out." He smirked. It made him feel happy to be needed.

"Stupid rule." El frowned and pulled away from him. "Please stay?"

Mike weighed the options carefully. Hopper usually didn't check in on anyone before he left for work, so he probably wouldn't even know, right? A flash of light outside, and the booming roar of a storm answered his question for him. El yelped and curled into his chest, crying again. She was more important than any punishment the two of them might face later. He laid down so that her head rested on his chest. He pulled the blankets up over her and wiped the blood away from her lip.

The storm raged on outside, every thundering clap sent a jolt through the young girl but eventually she fell asleep again. Peacefully this time.

---

"It's so weird, it never rains this hard in august." Lucas grumbled out the kitchen window. It really was a mystery to everyone where the storm had come from, but it hadn't stopped pouring rain is almost three days.

"I bet when it finally stops the creek is going to be a full fledged river." Dustin retorted, mouth full of chips.

Mike looked at his friend dismayed. "Maybe, but it is totally ruining summer. Plus you smell like a wet dog."

Dustin barked in reply and shoved more chips into his mouth.

"Come on guys you have to admit that it's not normal." Lucas turned to face the group, clearly exasperated.

"Maybe we should ask Joyce." El said nervously. Since the Byers family had come into their lives, Joyce had become the frequent bearer of bad news. 'Lucas don't shoot that bee hive, its not abandoned.' 'Dustin if you climb that tree you are going to break your leg. Yes even if you turn into a monkey.' Joyce always knew when something bad was going to happen, and although she tried diligently to let life around her takes its course, she couldn't watch those she cared for suffer.

As if it were an answer to the question on everyone's mind, the phone rang, and who should be on the other end? But Joyce, of course.

"Hey kids I have important to tell you. How about we come over when Hop gets home from work?" Mike, who had answered the phone, mumbled an agreement.

The group spent the remaining few hours theorising what Joyce knew, and what this storm had to do with it.

---

Hopper came out at his usual time of 5:15pm. He had barely sat down when the doorbell rang, and a very giddy group of teens came running up from the basement to answer it. He pinched the bridge of his nose; There were already enough children in his house and they invited more? His rigid demeanor softened when he saw it was just Joyce and her boys, but from the look on her face, this was no friendly visit.

"I'll make some coffee." He sighed.

The kids huddled together on the couch, jittery with anticipation. Hopper sat in his usual leather armchair.

"So what's going on Joyce?" Hopper finally said, lighting a cigarette. Joyce took in a deep breathe and set down her mug on the coffee table.

"It's about the strange weather." She began. "And the dream you had, Eleven." Els mouth fell open. Her and Mike shared an uneasy glance. They had not mentioned her nightmare to anyone.

"I think the girl you saw... I think somehow she is responsible for the storm. I think she needs our help."

"Woah woah, what dream? What girl?" Hopper didn't like El to keep secrets from him. Especially not after everything they had gone through with the lab just a month prior.

"A few nights ago El had a dream about a girl who was crying, and a terrible thunderstorm, and it hasn't stopped raining since." Mike answered for her.



"Could this girl be... Controlling the weather?" Lucas asked astonished.

"As crazy as it might sound, I think she is. I had a vision of her crying, curled up in fear, the day the storm started. I think she is scared and this is the result." Joyce recounted her vision with a grimace, her empathy often made her feel the pain of others so intensely it may as well be her own.

"So what do we do? How do we help?" Hopper huffed.

"I can find her." El said, stepping forward.

El sat criss crossed on the living room floor in front of the small TV set. Lucas had given her his trusty bandana, and she tied it tightly around her eyes. Mike sat just behind her, giving her space but also ready to shake her out of her trance if need be. The rest of the bunch sat quietly around the living room, all watching the young girl intently.

She flicked her head once, and the TV turned on. She flicked her head again, searching through the channels looking for the static snow that she needed to help her concentrate. Finally she found it, and the room filled with the calming white noise.

In mere seconds she found herself in the void, cold and oppressive blackness in all directions. She focused on the memory of her dream, channeling her fear, and burning the image of the girl, and her fiery red hair, into her vision.

Slowly, in the distance, a scene began to materialize. El walked forward, and with each step the mirage became more and more clear. El could see the same bed from before, but this time it had sheets and blankets. El could see a pile of dirty clothes on the floor, and some posters taped up on the wall behind the bed. She walked closer still, trying to locate some sense of where this room was, or why it was important. Suddenly the door to the room flew open, and the fire haired girl was thrown inside by someone El couldn't see. She heard muffled shouting, just as she had in her dream, and the girl yelled in response.

The girl turned, walking past El to the room's small window. The girl threw the window open and stuck her head out into the pouring rain. She was crying, and the thunder outside roared. The girl reached over and grabbed a skateboard that was leaning on the wall, and climbed out onto the window's ledge. The girl turned around, looking through El to the door behind her, her lip trembling and her eyes filled with painful tears. She mumbled some obscenity at the door and then jumped off the ledge to the ground below, out of El's sight.

El ran to the window, trying to peer into the blurry landscape beyond the scene she had materialized. It was hard to tell exactly, but El recognized the street the girl was now skating down even in the blackened rain. It was a street she knew well, and it wasn't far away.

El jolted back into her body, throwing off the bandana and standing up.

"I know where she is!" El yelled excitedly at her waiting audience.

She grabbed her jacket from the nearby rack, and threw open the door, running outside into the rain. The rest of the room stared at the girls quickly vanishing figure and the boys jumped to attention. They followed her in a like manner, quickly adorning jackets and shoes and cursing as they tried to spill outside after their friend.

"What the hell?" Hopper asked dumbfounded. "El come back here!" He yelled out the door.

But she was too far away to hear, and even if she had, she wouldn't have stopped for anything.

El ran as fast as she could, despite the wind and rain, and Hoppers scolding. The boys were close behind her, yelling for her to slow down but she ignored them. Something in her gut pulled her forward, pulled her in the direction she knew the girl would be. El couldn't figure out why she felt such a strong sense of determination to find this girl, but she had also never dreamed about anyone this way before.

"El stop!" Mike's voice cried from behind her. She was at the road now, only a few blocks away from where she had seen the girl. She

paused, only now realizing how out of breath she was. The boys caught up to her a few seconds later and they all panted in silence for a moment.

"Where... are... you... going?" Lucas demanded in between heavy breathes.

"The girl, I saw her. She is nearby but we have to hurry." El turned and started running again down the road. Mike and Will took off after her again, not wanting to let her out of sight.

"Shit." Dustin and Lucas panted in unison before starting back into a jog. Dustin shifted into a fit black lab and bounded ahead somewhat more leisurely.

El took a sharp turn down Old Cherry Road, slipping slightly in a muddy puddle but continuing forward. She looked ahead up the long street, and in the distance she saw a figure headed towards her. A figure with fiery red hair.

She slowed slightly, letting the boys catch up to her but pressing forward. The girl was skating down the hill with intense speed, the water on the road only adding to her momentum. El jogged another couple of blocks before she stopped, she had come all this way but she hadn't thought about how to approach this stranger.

"Is that her?" Will asked, now standing at her side.

"Yes."

"I've never seen a girl skateboarder before." Lucas said somewhat in awe. Dustin barked an affirmation.

The girl sped closer, still building speed and noticeably angry. The storm raged on overhead, the black and blue clouds crawled and rolled forward like the ocean. She was only a few yards away, and she was staring at the ground in front of her. She hadn't noticed the party yet.

"Stop!" El shouted at the girl.

The girl jerked her head up, causing her to lose balance. She wobbled

for a moment but the ground was too wet and she was moving too fast. Her feet slid off the board and suddenly she was flying through the air, headed face first into the cement.

El gasped and shot a hand out towards the girl, her eyes focusing on her like daggers. In an instant the girl stopped falling. It was like time stood still, her scream caught in her throat and when she didn't hit the ground, she opened her eyes.

She was suspended in the air, only inches above the road. She started to panic, looking around frantically. Is this what dying feels like? She whimpered and flailed her arms around, reaching towards the ground. El released the girl from her grasp and she lightly thudded to the ground. She took a moment to regain her composure, but she slowly pushed herself up.

"What the hell..." She whispered once she got to her feet.

Stranding in front of her were four strange looking kids, and a dog. All of whom she had never seen before. The only closest to her, the girl who had yelled and made her fall off her board, was reaching out to her and bleeding from her nose. The strange girl dropped her hand and smiled, taking a few steps forward.

"Hello." The strange girl said as if nothing was out of the ordinary. "My name is El. What's your?"

The fire haired girl said nothing, she just stared forward with her mouth open in disbelief.

"Its okay, I stopped you from falling." El said coolly.

"You... You stopped me from falling but... but how?"

El smiled, suppressing a laugh. She held out a hand, and the girls skateboard flew from across the road into her palm. She looked over the board for a moment before handing it back to the girl who was still gawking at her.

"I... Im dead. I hit my head so hard that I died. This is crazy." The girl reached up and touched her head but felt no pain.

"You are not dead." El said stepping forward again. "It is not crazy. I can move things without touching them, and you can make it rain."

The girl gasped. How did this random girl know about that? Who is she and who are these boys? "How..."

"I saw you. You are like us." El gestured to the boys. They gave a slight nod in response.

"Us?" She asked. To answer her question, Dustin shifted out of his dog form, and back into a human. He gave a weak smile and a wave.

"We can all do things. Things that others cant. Just like you." El looked up into the sky, the rain had stopped to only a light drizzle now, and the clouds were significantly less dark.

"Not the only one." El smiled. "We stick together, help each other feel less alone."

"I thought I was the only one... I never knew that other people could... do things too."

The girl considered the strangers in front of her for a moment. So she wasn't crazy, and she wasn't dead. These people were real, with real abilities just like her, and they seemed nice enough. Could she really trust them? Something about El's eyes made her feel like maybe she could.

"Less alone... I guess I could use help like that." She stepped forward, meeting El in the middle of the street. The rain had stopped completely now, but no one seemed to notice. She held a hand out to El for a hand shake, even though it seemed silly at this point.

"My name is Max."

## 14. Chapter Thirteen: Choose Your Fighter

"You hear something crawling up the cave walls behind you. Its haunting and slithery, like a snake, but it's much larger than that, and its growling low and angry like a lion stalking its prey."

Mike was setting the tone for the big finale of his nearly 10 hour campaign. He had the party on the edge of their seats, hanging on his every word.

"The orb of light still floating above, gives you the slightest indication of the beasts appearance. You can see the outline of its large hulking silhouette, like a massive serpent coiling and uncoiling itself, lurking forward with hunger in its eyes." He continued

"Oh shit its the Basilisk." Dustin mumbled, frantically flipping through his notes.

"It's not the Basilisk! They haven't been seen in this region in years!" Lucas yelled incredulously.

"But this cave system has never been explored!" Dustin retorted.

"Guys shut up! Let him finish." Will scolded.

Mike smirked devilishly and continued. "Will sends the floating orb closer to the beast. It casts a thin veil of light over its massive claws and dripping scaly body. The orb floats higher, searching in the darkness for the monsters face! The monster darts forward, stepping into the light and hissing loudly, causing your skin to crawl." He pauses as the boys shudder. "The orb floats higher still, finally giving light to the creatures identity!" He slams forward a small statue of a grotesque reptilian monster, whose mouth hangs open, drooling and thirsty for blood. "It's the dreaded Basilisk!" He screams mischievously.

The boys groan and kick each other under the table. Dustin flips through his notes for the thousandth time, Lucas just gapes in horror.

"Will it's your move!" Mike yells at the smallest boy, who up to this

point has been very quiet. The boys lean in intently, watching Will think over his options.

He pondered for a moment, rolling the shiny 20 sided dice around in his fingers. "I'm gonna fireball him." He said with a satisfied smirk. All of the boys gasp, completely surprised by his bravery, or foolishness, and Mike settles back behind his DM screen.

Will rolls his dice out onto the table, but it bounces off and falls to the floor.

"SHIT!" The boys yell in unison, scrambling on their hands and knees to find the die. Mike bumps his head on the table, knocking over the statues and curses loudly. Dustin and Lucas shove and push each other in some fight over where the die had fallen.

Max and El chuckle to themselves across the basement, safely avoiding the struggle. The boys had been playing their game all day, and it was either sweet, or terribly dorky, depending on which girl you asked. The two girls had become fast friends since their meeting only a week ago. Max was over almost everyday, and had been caught up quickly on the entire groups history and habits.

"They are such idiots." Max rolled her eyes at the frantic boys. El giggled and nodded. El looked over the boys with fondness, especially the curly haired one who was rubbing his temple in pain.

Suddenly, El saw something glimmer in her periphery. She turned and saw the die had rolled all the way to the basement door, not anywhere near where the boys were searching. She focused on the small shape and lifted it effortlessly into the air, careful not to let it turn over.

"Mike." She said gently, not letting her focus break from the object for a second. He jerked his head up to look at her, and followed her gaze to the floating sphere.

"Oh wow! Guys! El found it!" He clambered up and ran over the tiny object. He grabbed it from the air and read its top facing number, smiling coily.

"Oh shit, Wheeler, what does it say?" Lucas huffed, dropping back into his seat.

"We are toast aren't we?" Dustin conceded, hanging his head in defeat.

Mike took his seat back at the table, and Will returned to his place directly across, eyes focused and ready for whatever the outcome was.

"It's a..." Mike started, dragging the answer out in suspense. The boys leaned forward, eager and impatient. "A natural 20!" He screamed.

The boys jumped up in excitement! Screaming and cheering and patting Will on the back.

"Will shoots the Basilisk in its open mouth, the fire travels down his throat and into his acidic belly! He stumbles backwards, screaming in pain and trips over the edge of the cliff! Falling into the bottomless trench once and for all!"

The boys cheered louder, Will and Lucas embarrassed in a celebratory hug, and Dustin imitated playing a bardic song of victory on an imaginary lute. Mike wrapped up the campaign, speeding through the ending and awarding each member their due riches and experience points.

"Are you morons finally done now?" Max asked, standing off the couch and walking towards the rowdy group.

"Hey no one said you had to sit there and watch us the whole time." Mike sneered.

"I didn't watch you the whole time, egomaniac! El and I went for a skate and got ice cream and you guys didn't even notice." She grinned and crossed her arms. El got off the couch and joined her, wrapping her arms around Mike's shoulders.

"Wait really?" Dustin asked astonished.

"Yeah, you dorks were so wrapped up in your game that you literally didn't even know. We came back and you guys hadn't moved, it was



kind of creepy." She laughed.

"Why didn't you tell me?" Mike turned to El, who was resting her chin on his shoulder.

"We did tell you, you didn't hear." She snickered, kissing his cheek and standing back up.

Max grabbed a small statue from the table's surface and looked it over. It was a small wizard, meant to depict Wills character.

"So when are you going to teach me and El to play?" She asked turning the figure around in her hand.

The boys all looked from Max to Mike, and back again.

"Well... girls dont really play D&D." Dustin muttered quietly.

"And plus our party is already full!" Mike quickly added.

Max looked over the boys, face suddenly creased in confusion. "Are you serious right now?" She scoffed. Dustin and Mike looked at her unblinking, Will and Lucas sat in the uncomfortable silence.

"What?" Mike and Dustin asked in unison.

"Girls dont play D&D? Are you kidding me?" She raised her voice, crossing her arms and raising her eyebrows.

El looked over the boys for a moment. This was a tension she had never experienced before and it didn't make sense. Why would there be something that girls couldn't do? Mike had taught her a lot about the game he loved so much, and she was always interested and excited to learn, so why could she not play? She walked over to her friend and mirrored her position, crossing her arms in firm agitation.

"Yeah why not?" El asked.

"It's not that girls can't play! Its that they usually don't! It's just really gory and violent!" Dustin said trying to defend himself.

"Yeah it's all fighting and monsters." Mike added.

"Gorey and violent!?" Max yelled. "You think i'm afraid of stupid monsters? I asked you all to watch Texas Chainsaw Massacre and

were too scared! El has literally killed people! You are just being sexist assholes and you know it." She huffed. Mike stood up to try to reason with her but she turned and grabbed her bag, stomping up the stairs and slamming the basement door behind her.

"Wait! Max!" Lucas hollered up after her. "Nice going dicks!" He smacked Dustin and Mike on the back of the head before running up behind her.

"What I was just being honest!?" Dustin yelled throwing his arms up in exasperation. He stood up and walked into the bathroom, slamming the door.

"Mike, I don't understand." El said still clearly upset. "Why can't we play? Fighting monsters is not going to scare us."

"Well... it's not really about that. It's more like..." Mike pondered how to explain for a moment. "There are just things that boys do that girls usually don't, and this is one of them."

El raised an eyebrow at him. She felt offended but she wasn't sure why. What made this different than other board games?

"But Dustin is just being stupid!" Mike quickly added standing up. "Of course you guys can play with us, you are members of the party anyway." He smiled, wrapping an arm around El.

"Yeah I want to play with you, I bet you would be really good." Will beamed.

Max stomped through the house and out the kitchen door, pushing past Nancy and running out in the yard. She cursed to herself under her breath and grabbed her skateboard off the porch. How dare they try to tell her she couldn't play with them? And for such a stupid reason? It was just some dumb game, so why did they care so much? And why were her feelings so hurt?

She began the walk down the long dirt and gravel driveway, angry that she couldn't just skate down, when Lucas burst through the door

behind her.

"Wait!" He hollered after her, but she pressed forward ignoring him. She had gotten better at controlling her feelings and powers since working with Hop and the other kids, but as he ran to join, her the wind picked up steadily.

He finally caught up with her and grabbed onto her arm, pulling her around to face him.

"What do you want, stalker!?" She yelled at him.

"I wanted to talk to you. And to apologize for Dustin, he was just being a jerk." He smiled sincerely.

"Yeah no duh!" Max huffed.

"But we don't all feel that way, at least I know I don't. I have never played D&D with a girl before, but I think you would be fun to play with. You're cool and you're not like a lot of other girls." Lucas nervously rubbed the back of his neck. Max noticed that there was the slightest tinge of warm pink under the skin of his face.

"I just don't understand why he would say something like that. I thought you guys wanted me to be your friend but whenever I try to be a part of whatever you are doing you all just act weird!" She threw her skateboard down in the grass and used it like a seat, crossing her arms.

"That's not true, we don't try to be mean to your or anything like that!" Lucas quickly replied.

"Well you are! Like the other day at the arcade, Dustin practically cried when I got to new top score in Digdug. And then he wouldn't talk to me the entire rest of the day!"

Lucas sat down across from her, he leaned back on his palms and squinted at her in the bright august sun. "It's complicated, I think maybe we just don't know how to act around you."

"You don't know how to act around me? Why because i'm a girl? But you have all known El for months!" She threw her hands up in

frustration.

"But thats different, like completely different. El isnt really like a normal girl, she never had any friends or anything before us so she kind of liked all of us right away. And you know the way her and Mike are together, it's been like that since the beginning. So it was just easy I guess." He played with the tall blades of grass, nervously ripping them apart in his fingers.

Max thought for a moment, trying to understand what he meant by a friendship with El as being 'easy'.

"I liked all of you right away too." She finally said after a long silence. "Well at least I did until Dustin started acting weird. It's not like I had a ton of friends in California anyway." She hugged her knees and joined Lucas in playing with the grass in front of her.

"Do you miss it?" Lucas asked after another pause. Max looked up confused. "California I mean? Hawkins doesn't have any beaches or sand or anything."

"Sometimes. Mostly I guess I just miss my dad." She sighed. "It really sucks being so far away from him, because he is the only person who never treated me like a monster because of my powers. We moved up here because my mom has family here and her new husband was worried I would make a tsunami or something." She scoffed.

"That does suck, that your parents are split up. That has to be hard." Lucas looked at her, eyes filled with sympathy. It made her feel warm inside despite the heavy breeze she had created.

"It's fine, when two people dont love each other anymore they shouldn't stay together." She shrugged. "And Hawkins is pretty cool. It's nice to know there are other freaks in the world." She laughed.

Lucas laughed with her, nodding in agreement. The wind around them died down slightly, letting the humidity of summer settle back down on them, wrapping them in warm stagnant air.

"I'm sorry about Dustin. He is an idiot, but he really does mean well. Mike too." Lucas said trying his best to make her feel better. "It's just

that girls don't really talk to us. They think we are weird and they usually just make fun of us." Lucas mumbled.

"Well you are weird." She laughed, playfully throwing a handful of grass at him. "But I guess i'm weird too, because I

like you." Her cheeks turned a subtle red underneath her golden tan and freckles.

"I like you too, Madmax." He smirked. "And I really shouldn't be telling you this, but I think the only reason Dustin is acting like that is because he likes you too. A lot"

Max paused, eyes wide. Did little Dustin have a stupid crush on her? And he was dealing with it be bullying her like a little kid? She laughed hard, grabbing her stomach, the whole thing was just too dumb to make her mad.

"I guess I can forgive him then," She sighed, falling back into the grass and looking up at the clouds. "Besides, i'm gonna get revenge when I kick his ass during the next campaign."

"You are probably right," Lucas moved around and layed in the grass next to her only a foot or so apart. "He isn't very good." Both young teens laughed, turning red and enjoying the warmth and company.

They stayed that way for awhile, looking at the clouds and listening to the crickets somewhere far off in the field. Every few minutes or so one of them would point to a cloud and describe what it looked like, making each other wheeze with laughter. Max turned and smiled at the boy. How had she been so mad only a few minutes ago, and how had he known exactly what to say to make it better? Lucas is nice, she decided, glancing at the eager boy next to her.

Out of all the boys, Lucas was the only one to ever really listen to her. She had gathered that his relationship with his parents was not much better than her own, and that made it easier to open up. Maybe moving to Hawkins really was for the better. If it meant she got to make friends with people like El and Lucas Sinclair, then it must be alright.

## 15. Chapter Fourteen: The Lab

Hello everyone! As I am sure you could tell by my infrequent updates, this story is coming to an end soon, and to be honest I have kind of fallen out of love with the concept. I have a lot of other things in the works right now that are just holding my attention more fervently at the moment.

With that said, I want to thank you all for your support, and your lovely comments. Hope you enjoy!

---

El sat in the passenger's seat of Hoppers car, looking out the window at the passing trees. The nearer she got to their destination, the more tense she grew. She realized that she had been curling her fists so tight that her nails were digging into her palms. She shook off the pain in her hands and sighed.

"Don't be nervous." Hopper said, trying his best to be reassuring, but El could hear the uncertainty in his voice.

She turned to look at him, and he smiled, still watching the road. Today was the day everyone had been dreading for months now.

The day they had to go to Hawkins lab, and meet with the same organization who had caused them all so much pain; The same organization who held El prisoner her whole life.

Everyone was nervous, in fact, nervous was an understatement. Everyone had met at the Byers house earlier that morning so Joyce could try to calm everyone nerves, but it did little aside from making her tired. They set out, El and Hopper in his truck, the boys and Max with Joyce, and the older teens in Jonathan's car, headed towards their destination. When Hopper made this arrangement it felt too surreal to ever come to fruition, but now here they were, pulling up to the tall, guarded gates.

El resisted the urge to throw open the car door and run away into the woods. Her and Hopper had had a long fight about this very topic the night before. He said it was going to be fine, and that he wouldn't let

anyone hurt her or take her away, but he didn't know these people the way she did. Even if Papa and all of his colleagues were dead, this was still a laboratory, not a hospital, and everyone inside was adamant on not leaking secrets out into the world; And El and her new family were all pretty massive secrets.

Hopper, who had been leading the other vehicles towards their destination, leaned out his window and had a brief conversation with the armed guard. The guard pressed a button and the gate jolted to life, springing forward and allowing entrance. El sunk into her seat, not wanting to look out at the building, or the soldiers, or the sewage drain she had crawled through to make her escape.

All three cars pulled into the parking lot and shut off their engines. The passengers poured out onto the pavement, aside from El who stayed glued to her seat.

"Mike can you go talk her down please? We can't keep doing this all day." Hopper huffed, lighting a cigarette.

Mike walked over the police chiefs passenger door and opened it to find El, trembling slightly and curled forward into a ball, her arms wrapped around her knees.

"I know how scared you must be, but I promise it's going to be alright." He extended a hand out and squeezed her arm lightly.

"Not safe." She mumbled into her knee.

"Maybe not, but we can take down anyone who tries to hurt us, just like before." Mike said confidently.

El looked at him, at the boy she cared for more than anything, and slowly she uncurled herself. She slipped out of her seat, taking his hand tightly.

"Promise?"

"Promise."

---

The entire party made their way into the labs front entrance. They

were greeted by several men and women in lab coats, a set of guards with large military grade weapons, and a stout doctor with a beaming smile.

"Hello everyone, thank you all for coming. Welcome to Hawkins lab, My name is Dr. Owens." The grey haired man stuck his hand out for Hopper and Joyce to shake.

"What's all this? I thought we had an understanding." Hopper gestured to the soldiers.

Dr. Owens chuckled. "Just a precaution. Now, shall we have a tour?" He turned around and began walking down one of the long hallways. "Assuming you're behind me." He hollered over his shoulder.

The group sped up to match his pace, Hopper, Joyce, and Nancy taking the lead and asking any and all questions they had. Dr. Owens led the group around the maze like building, taking one hallway after another. He pointed out a few rooms and gave brief description of what was behind the doors. He motioned to some passing doctors and scientists, stating their names and what their job was. It all seemed so simple, like it was just a normal research facility, like it wasn't some evil corporation with dark secrets.

Mike and El were still holding hands, they only caught bits of what Dr. Owens was saying because of the boys whispering and giggling in front of them. Mike leaned forward, smacking the back of Dustin's head.

"This isn't some dumb school field trip asshole, this is serious." Mike huffed at his curly haired friend.

El was searching each and every inch of the lab they passed, as if Papa would be lurking in some dark corner, or hiding just out of sight. She shuddered every time they passed by a room she recognized, and she gasped when they walked by the cell she used to call a bedroom.

Down on a lower level of the building, Dr. Owens lead them into a large sterile room that looked like the wing of a hospital. White walls, and a white floor, with pale blue curtain partitions sectioning



off a dozen or so private stalls. Each stall had a small table, and a folded stack of hospital scrubs and gowns. El squeezed Mikes hard hard when she saw the gown in a stall marked 'subject 011', this was getting too close for comfort.

"So I am sure you all want to know what is going to happen today." Dr. Owens said, clasping his hands together in front of the group. "Here in just a moment I am going to have you all change into those sterile scrubs, and leave all of your belongings in here. Then we are going to take you all into separate interview rooms where we will ask you to perform your abilities in front of an assigned specialist. They are going to ask you lots of questions, and ask you to perform various tasks. It's going to be extensive and tedious, but it is in everyone's best interest if you all do as you are asked, and don't hide anything from us."

"So what? We are going to be like little lab rats for you? I don't think so." Joyce scolded, stepping forward.

"Listen, I am on your side here. The things our team has done in the past, we aren't proud of them. They hurt a lot of people and made a lot of terrible mistakes. But I am the guy they brought in to try to fix those mistakes, and I can't do that without your help." Owens stated coolly. "You all are capable of things that should be impossible, and as the people responsible we just want to try to understand a little bit more about it."

Everyone looked between each other, unsure of what to do. These people were not to be trusted, that was for certain, but at the same time Dr. Owens did have a point; Their abilities *should* be impossible, but they aren't, and it *would* be nice to know more about them.

"You do understand that if you try anything, it's gonna be the last mistake you make, right?" Hopper said sternly, glancing at the soldiers guarding the door.

"I would expect nothing less. But we are all friends here." The doctor smiled.

Hopper turned and headed into a stall, closing the curtain harshly behind him. The rest of the group slowly followed, one by one filling

a stall and changing into their medical garb. El took the longest, gripping the thin fabric of her gown in her hands for a long time before putting it on. To her the measly garment felt more like shackles.

Once everyone was dressed, Dr. Owens led them to a long hallway and sent them each into separate rooms. He rambled off the names of the researches and what they specialized in, pairing each Doctor with a member of the group. El froze, gripping Mike's hand.

"I am not going in alone." She stated, looking Dr. Owens in the eye.

He crouched down to look at her directly, smiling softly. "I know that this must be difficult for you given your history here, but you have to help me out and cooperate. Having each of you perform your abilities separately is the best way for us to observe and calculate them."

"I don't care. I'm not going in alone." She tensed her jaw.

He sighed and motioned another doctor over. They whispered back and forth for awhile before he finally conceded.

"Okay, but I am only making this acceptance for you. Mr. Hopper can go in with you." He looked up at Hop who nodded.

El let go of Mike's hand and reluctantly let him go into his room. Hopper followed El into hers and ruffled her messy curls the way that always made her smile, even now.

Dr. Owens wasn't lying when he said the tests would be 'extensive and tedious'. The scientists asked any and every question under the sun.

'when did you develop your abilities?'

'Do you notice they are stronger at night or during the day?'

'Do you notice a change when you eat spicy foods?'

'Do they affect your menstrual cycle?'

'Do they change when you are sick?'

'When was your last minor head injury?'

When they decided they finally had enough answers, it was on to the big performance. It felt like some sort of strange talent show, and no one had ever performed their abilities under such clinical circumstance, aside from Eleven.

Dustin shifted into at least three dozen animals at the researchers request before falling over in exhaustion. He panted and flopped on his back on top of the rooms interview table. By the time he was done he had full blown eczema wrapping around his arms and neck, a symptom the doctor found both astonishing and alarming.

Lucas constructed countless objects, mostly just abstract shapes of various sizes, but as the tests continued the requests became more odd and specific. It was when we was asked to create a 3' by 2' elephant statue that he keeled over in exhaustion, hands blistered and burning.

Will was asked to shift in an out of invisibility until the room started to spin around him. He finally tapped out after turning a table, three chairs, a tv set, and an entire file cabinet invisible.

Max, who was still fairly new in using her powers, was asked to create every type of storm you can name, in a contained setting. Table top tornadoes, hurricanes inside glass jars, blizzards in the palm of her hand, and hail the size of golf balls. She couldn't complete much before she was shaking and tired, crying hard as a side effect.

Mike's observation room was filled with myriad of flammable objects, all of which we was asked to ignite and extinguish. By the end he was dripping sweat, and had fresh burns across all his knuckles and the joints of his wrists.

Steve was recorded on a high speed camera, in an attempt at being able to slow down his intense speed and properly calculate it. He was taken into a longer hallway and timed. He ran the hallways 60 times in only 2.3 seconds.

Nancy created snow, icicles, a blizzard, a wall of frozen water, and

she cased a lab attendant in ice and then unfroze him. She lowered the temperature in her room to the point that the water in her researched cup froze solid and broke the glass it was in. Her skin was blue and badly cracked by the time they released her.

Jonathan blackened his observation room a number of times, as well as projected various shadow depictions onto the wall with a number of different lightly variables. By time he was finished he had essentially performed a shadow puppet show. His vision was spotty at best and he needed help simply walking out of the room.

Joyce was asked to invoke a vision of the future in regards to a set of flashcards the scientist would read after she had given her prediction. She did so flawlessly, as well as changed the moods of a few very eager scientists, calming them into almost a stupor before bringing them back to normal. Her head pounded and her eyes were terribly bloodshot when they decided they had enough data.

Hopper displayed a series of fighting styles, all of which he had never been properly trained in or studied, and he did them all with the precision of a master. He was also asked to bench press an increasingly heavy weight set, tapping out at 1.5 tons. To the surprise of the scientists, his symptom manifests itself in Jim vomiting, an unfortunate side effect he had all but warned off in his training over the last few years.

Then it was El's turn. Dr. Owens oversaw her tests himself, and they had pulled some of her old files for comparison. They ran similar tests to those she had perfected as a child. Crush the coke can, read back the words the man is saying across the building, find the man the next town over, ect. It was evident her skills has grown immensely. It took little time for her to be able to complete her tasks, and those that had wiped her out before merely made her head hurt now. Her nose didn't even bleed until she was asked to lift the table and chairs, and Dr. Owens himself.

---

After the tests were complete, the group was lead into a very hospital looking conference room with comfortable chairs, but still an overall clinical environment. They sat there for a long time, discussing amongst themselves the odd testing, and generally feeling disheveled

from the day. The researched and scientists discussed their findings a few rooms over with excitement for what felt like hours.

Dr. Owens finally came back into the room, followed by several nurses carrying nutrient rich drinks for everyone to replenish their energy. El remembered the bitter pastry drink well from her time here before.

"So we got a lot done today." Dr. Owens said, taking a seat across from the exhausted and somewhat irritable group. "And I thank you all very much for helping us with our work. But, unfortunately, science like this takes time and effort to understand, and for any progress to be made we are going to need to test you all again." He braced himself for the impact of what he had just said.

"That was not our deal!" Hopper raised his voice and stood, but staggered and sat back down, feeling another wave of nausea.

"Our deal was, I don't have you all killed for what you did to our organization, and you help me learn about your gifts. There was very little specificity." Owens said, leaning back in his chair.

"So what? We just keep coming back here over and over again until you decide we may as well be locked up inside like prisoners?" Nancy raised a purple finger at the man.

"No, you come back here on a schedule, no more, no less. Right now i'm thinking once a month for a while, and then maybe less. At least for some of you." He stated firmly.

"This crazy! Are you out of your mind? We aren't some circus act you can just gawk at!" Joyce stood up yelling.

"Look I understand! But I think a little show and tell once a month is a pretty price to pay in exchange for freedom, and safety." He vaguely gestured to Eleven, knowing Hoppers weak spot.

Hopper opened his mouth to say more, but closed it. The man was right, Eleven was safe, and some strange part of him felt like he could trust this doctor. He nodded sternly and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"So why did this happen?" Will asked sheepishly from the back of the room.

"What?" Dr. Owens leaned forward, face twisted in confusion.

"Why do we have... gifts? Why were they trying to make El have powers? And why did they keep her here?" He asked with a bit more confidence.

"Yeah and what gave them to all of us?" Lucas popped up.

"And why are they all so different?" Mike added.

"And what is with the symptoms?" Dustin asked, practically interrupting Mike.

Dr. Owens looked from boy to boy, and saw all of the eyes watching him intensely, begging for an answer.

"I can see you all have a lot of questions, and that is what we are trying to figure out. Why did you get these abilities? Why you and not someone else? What makes them different? We want to know too." Owens sighed.

"And why me? When I didn't even live here." Max leaned forward on the table, looking at him strictly.

"I don't know yet. But we are going to find out. Together." Dr. Owens smiled and stood. "Now let's get you home and schedule our next visit."

He led them back into the room where they had changed, and everyone got dressed back into their clothes from before. They silently filed out into the parking lot and waved goodbye at the strangely jolly Owens, who grinned at them from the doorway.

They got in their cars, agreeing to meet at Hoppers' house for a dinner together to discuss everything, and drove off in dazed confusion. What was going to happen? Were any of them safe? Can Dr. Owens be trusted? Are the tests going to be harder? More dangerous? It was overwhelming to say the least, and impending like a distant storm.

El watched out the window again, mindlessly counting the passing trees with her gaze, and absent mindlessly grabbing hoppers hand. He squeezed it to try to reassure her, and in some ways, himself. It was going to be okay, it had to be. For her, it needed to be, and if it were up to him it would be.

He would make sure of it.